

S E R M O N S

By the late

Rev. CHARLES PETERS, *M. A.*

RECTOR OF

ST. MABYN'S, CORNWALL,

(Author of the Critical Dissertation on the
B O O K of J O B.)

PUBLISHED from his MSS.

B Y

His NEPHEW JON. PETERS, *M. A.*

Vicar of St. CLEMENT'S, near TRURO, CORNWALL.

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SEKMONS

THE CHARTERED

ST. MARTIN'S



THE NEW JON PETERS

THE NEW JON PETERS

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Advertisement to the Public.

THE pious and learned Author of the following Discourses was pleased to intimate to me, about two Years before his Death, that it was his Pleasure I should publish some of his Sermons, as a Specimen of his Manner of Preaching to a Country Congregation. In Consequence thereof, I offer these to the Perusal of the Public, on whose Judgment alone will depend all future Publication. I have this only to add, that, if they find such a Reception as to make a further Publication appear to be desired, I shall take Care to publish none but such as have been revised and perfected by the Author himself.

JON. PETERS, Vicar of St. Clement's,
near Truro, Cornwall.

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2 Tim. iii. 15.

And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.

THERE is hardly any thing by which a Christian may reap greater benefit and advantage, than by a careful reading of the Holy Scriptures. And indeed whosoever does but consider the Holy Bible to be that solemn Book, by the words of which he must be judged and sentenced at the last day, will easily conclude that it is impossible to read it too often, or to know too much of it.

St. Paul in this Epistle to Timothy, amongst his other exhortations to him to continue steadfast in the Christian faith, puts him in mind of this as a peculiar privilege he enjoyed, that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures: And immediately he adds this character of them, that through faith in Christ they

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were able to make him wise unto salvation. —In the words we may observe the two following particulars :

I. A duty implied, of knowing and understanding betimes the Holy Scriptures.

II. An argument or motive to inforce this duty, from the great advantages that may be derived from it, in that they are able to make us wise unto salvation.

And now, in order to the handling this point in the clearest and most useful method I can think of, I shall lay down the following particulars as the whole design of this discourse.

1. I shall endeavour to shew how much it is the duty of every Christian, as they have opportunity and capacity, to acquaint themselves with the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

And 2. I shall lay down some plain rules and cautions in order to our better progress and improvement in this sacred knowledge.

3. As an encouragement to the duty here recommended, I shall consider the great advantages of being well read or knowing in the Scriptures, and conclude with a practical inference.

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1. Then I am to shew how much it is the duty of every Christian, as they have opportunity and capacity, to acquaint themselves with the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

And there needs no other argument to convince us of this, than only to consider what those Sacred Writings are; and this, as to the material character of them, may be summed up in a few words: That they are a body of laws given us by Almighty God Himself to observe and practise; and, according as we live up to them, so shall be our future lot either of reward or punishment in the life to come.

Now as it is impossible for a man to live with comfort or security in any kingdom or nation whatsoever, without being so far at least acquainted with the laws and statutes of that kingdom where he lives, as that he may know how to govern his own conduct and behaviour by them; so it is alike impossible for a man to lead a religious life, without a competent knowledge of the laws of God, by which he ought to govern all his actions; without being acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, which are styled by way of eminence the Law of God, as containing all things whatsoever God requires, and man is bound

to perform, in order to the obtaining everlasting life.

Hence it is that our Blessed Lord, in answer to that question of the Lawyer, Luke x. 25, *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* immediately refers him to the Scriptures as the proper guide in that case: *What is written in the Law? how readest thou?*

So that whoever desires to find the way that leads to everlasting life must, according to our Blessed Saviour's rule, be diligent in searching the Holy Scriptures, where the way of life is pointed out to him in the plainest characters, so as they that run may read (according to the Prophet) and where the honest and well-meaning Christian may without much difficulty be instructed what he is to believe, and what to do, in order to Salvation.

I add, that a Christian is obliged to improve himself more and more in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, in proportion to that capacity and opportunity which God has given him for such improvement.

It is manifest to common observation, that the apprehensions and capacities of some people are much more ripe and perfect than that of others. Nature has not allowed the same parts, the same gifts of understanding to all.

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But, as a sufficient remedy for this, it is the peculiar character of the Holy Scriptures, that they are suited to all capacities. Those truths and doctrines of religion which are absolutely necessary to be known, in order to salvation, are delivered in such a plain and simple manner, as that a Christian of the meanest understanding, if he has but an honest heart, may quickly bring himself acquainted with them. And, if there be any points delivered in the Scriptures so profoundly mysterious, that they exceed the reach of common understandings, we have just reason to conclude that these points, whatsoever they be, are not absolutely necessary for every one to know, because every one is not capable of knowing them.

In short, as God has given to all men their several capacities of knowing and apprehending things; so He will require of no man greater measures of divine knowledge, than can reasonably be expected from that capacity which He has given him. Men of fine parts and a good degree of learning, as they are thereby enabled, so they are, perhaps, obliged to a more strict and narrow inquiry into the sublimer points and mysteries of religion, that the light of so much wisdom, as must needs appear to those who nicely examine the

whole scheme of our redemption, may inspire them with greater admiration, love, and awful apprehensions of that Sovereign Being, who contrived this wonderful salvation for us. But to say, that men of no learning, and very mean understandings, are obliged to know as much as the other, is indeed to require impossibilities, and consequently to exclude the vulgar, who are by far the greatest part of Christians, from the hopes and means of salvation. It is undoubtedly sufficient for such as these, and, generally speaking, it is much the safer way, to rest in those things which are plainly and clearly revealed; to read the Holy Scriptures with care and diligence, and not so much with a design to fill their heads with abstruse notions and speculations, as with a sincere resolution to perform their duty as they find it plainly laid before them, as knowing well, that a practical knowledge of the Scripture, such as any honest Christian may attain to if he pleases, together with a great deal of good intention, sincerity, and diligence in the doing of his duty, will as effectually carry a man of ordinary understanding to Heaven, as all the subtle and mysterious notions, about which the learned and unlearned too often busy themselves, without
increase

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increase of piety, or the bettering of their life and manners.

Again, as all Christians are obliged to improve themselves in the knowledge of the Scriptures according to their capacity, so likewise as they have opportunity and time for such improvement.—

It is plain, that all people have not leisure and opportunity alike.—Some men's condition of life does manifestly lay them under a necessity of greater labour, and more worldly business, than that of others.—And those persons, who are least of all cumbered about the necessary affairs of this life, have undoubtedly more vacant hours to bestow, and which therefore they ought to bestow, about this one thing needful, the reading and understanding the Holy Scriptures.

But, generally speaking, all Christians may find time enough for this employment if they please, much more indeed than they commonly make use of. And it were well if they could be persuaded, not only on the Lord's Day, but upon every day of the week, to take the Bible into their hands for a few minutes, and read over some portion of Scripture, and well consider it.

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And,

And, to give us a just notion of this matter, I shall close up this head with that instructive lesson which was given by God Himself to Joshua; and which, as it may shew us how great a measure of diligence God required in the Israelites, in order to their better knowledge and understanding of their law; so may it likewise shew us what may justly be demanded of every Christian, in order to a due understanding and right use of the Holy Scriptures:—*The Book of the Law* (says he) *shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.* Josh. i. 8.

2. I come now to the second thing proposed, which was to lay down some rules and cautions, in order to our better progress and improvement in this sacred knowledge.

It is a truth sufficiently confirmed by observation, that, of those who read the Holy Scriptures with seeming diligence, too many may be found that profit very little by what they read, and, after all the pains that they have taken, appear to be hardly any thing the wiser, or the better Christians for it. The reason of which must not be supposed any fault

fault or imperfection in the Holy Scriptures themselves, but some defect or other in those that read them; who, either for want of due care and caution in the reading of them, or, after they are read, for want of applying them to their proper use, which is the reformation of our hearts and lives, or through some other fault and neglect of their own, make that the reading of the Scriptures is of no real service to them, but rather (as it sometimes happens) even of dangerous and pernicious consequence; since we are told by the Apostle, that those who are unlearned and unstable (men of wavering minds, as well as weak understandings, who do not read the Holy Scriptures with simplicity of heart and a sincere intention to obey them) may wrest those Sacred Writings to their own destruction.

That we may therefore avoid the fate of such persons, and that the reading of the Scriptures may be of service to us,

The first rule necessary to be laid down is this, that they be read with attention and care. I say, he that would be the better for reading the Holy Scriptures must be sure to read them with all due attention. Every one knows how necessary a rule this is in the reading of any common book whatever; it must be read
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with pains and care, if we desire to understand it, or to improve by it. And surely then the Book of God may justly demand the utmost application of their minds, whenever they set about the reading of it; and the more intent they are upon it, the more they hope to profit by it.—To run over never so many chapters of the Holy Bible, without weighing or considering what we read, is the way that a man may read on for ever, and perhaps be just as wise at the latter end as he was at the beginning: Whereas he that makes it his business to attend with care to what he reads, that considers the force of every word, what truths and doctrines it contains, and how it may be applied to the better regulating his own practice, will never lay the Book out of his hands, without having reaped some spiritual benefit from it.

A second rule or caution, which I apprehend necessary to be observed in reading of the Scriptures, in order to your better understanding and improving by them, is this,—to begin with the plainest Books first.

For there are some Books of Scripture much more difficult to be understood than others,—and therefore these are not so proper to begin with; to be sure, not for people of
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mean and ordinary capacities, who want the necessary helps and assistances that should enable them to understand them. And yet this is a very common error with a great many people, to pass by the more plain and easy parts of Holy Writ, and to puzzle and perplex themselves about the difficult and mysterious parts of it:—Nay, and perhaps to set up themselves for expounders of it, when they are perfect strangers to the rules by which the sense of Holy Scripture is to be learned, and only wrest it to their own wild fancies and imaginations.—As there are some things plain and easy in the Scriptures, so we are assured by an Apostle himself, that there are likewise some things hard to be understood. And, in every science whatsoever, it is the usual and approved method to begin with the plainest things first, and so proceed by degrees to such as are more obscure and difficult.—And the same method is undoubtedly most proper to be used in reading of the Scriptures;—and, for our encouragement herein, it is certain that the plainest Books of Scripture, and such as are the easiest to be understood by people of ordinary capacities, are at the same time the most necessary and the most useful.

Thus

Thus there is no part of the Bible more plain or intelligible, most certainly none of greater use, than the Four Gospels; which relate the life, and miracles, and divine discourses of our Blessed Saviour; the bitter sufferings and death which He underwent for our redemption; and his rising again on the third day from the dead, to give us a proof and earnest of our own future resurrection at the last great day; to which we may add that description which is there given us of the future general judgment, where Christ Himself shall be the Judge—and next to these the Acts of the Apostles,—The other Books of the New Testament, the Epistles of St. Paul, particularly, have somewhat more of difficulty in them; and are not to be thoroughly understood, perhaps, without the helps of learning, and more study and application than the common sort of people are, for the most part, able to bestow about them. And, therefore, such as these will reap more benefit from the practical parts of those Epistles, which lay down rules for a good life, than from the doctrinal part, which is commonly more abstruse, and therefore the most apt to be mistaken. However, this too will be the better understood, and may be the more safely read
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by those who are beforehand well versed in the Gospels.

What has been observed of the New Testament may be likewise said of the Old. That the Books of Moses, and the other historical Books, are much more easy to be understood than the Books of the Prophets, which are therefore to be read with caution, as being the most difficult and mysterious part of the whole Bible.

The sum of this rule then, in a word, is this :—That as the plainest parts of Holy Scripture, and such as contain the rules and motives of a holy life, are, generally speaking, the most useful and necessary ; so they are the fittest to begin with, as well as to be oftenest read by people of ordinary capacities and understandings more especially ; who, as they seldom have discernment enough to lead them through the dark and difficult parts of Holy Writ, must of necessity trust their own judgment the less in these matters, and rely more upon that of others, and particularly of those who are set over them as their lawful guides and teachers.

For others who have more leisure and capacity for it, the reading some of the best expositors upon the Scriptures will be a great help

help towards the right understanding even the most abstruse and difficult parts of it.

3. As another rule,—be sure to read the Holy Bible with all due reverence and devotion.—It is a Book by no means to be taken into our hands like any common author, merely for our amusement—we are to receive it (according to the Apostle) not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God—and therefore we should do well to imagine to ourselves, that we hear (as it were) God himself speaking to us in the Scriptures, proclaiming in our ears his own divine commands, and telling us that we shall be happy or miserable for ever, as we obey or disobey his righteous laws.

It is easy to conceive how happy an effect such a reverential awe and veneration of the Holy Scriptures will have upon us, whenever we sit down to read or meditate therein.—It is indeed for want of this chiefly, that so many read the Scriptures in a careless and unprofitable manner, without being either affected with it as they read, or the better for it afterwards; whereas he who considers that the Scripture is the Word of God, and studies to excite within himself all that reverence and regard which is so justly due unto it upon that

that account, will undoubtedly be thereby induced to give all due attention to it as he reads, will be sure to treasure it up in his memory with care, and to bring forth the happy fruits of it in his life and conversation.

4. Another rule which I apprehend necessary, in order to a right understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and to avoid being led into any errors in the reading of them, is to interpret the more difficult places by those which are plainer and more intelligible, and by no means to understand any text in such a sense as may contradict our natural notions of God Almighty, and the plain dictates of right reason.

It is easy to see the use of this caution, if we consider how many false and dangerous notions have been embraced by those who have read the Scriptures after an unwary manner, and without observing some such rules as I have now been laying down. There are, indeed, hardly any false opinions in religion broached in the world, but the maintainers of them have endeavoured to defend them by some texts of Scripture, wrested to their purpose, and interpreted in a quite different sense from what they were designed. And the chief occasion of it seems to be this, that they have
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taken some one difficult passage or two of Holy Scripture, and interpreted it according to their own imaginations, without ever considering how it may be reconciled either with right reason or the other parts of Holy Scripture.—Whereas there can be no better way to understand the Scriptures right than to explain one text by another, and so as that none shall contradict the great law of Nature (which is likewise the law of God) those notions of right, and just, and good, which common reason teaches, and wherein the best and wisest men are generally agreed.—

To give an instance : When St. Paul says, *We are justified by faith without the deeds of the law.* This is such a text, as, taken by itself, may and has given occasion to very great errors ; as if the whole duty of a Christian were only to believe, and no matter how little of good works he performed, as long as faith alone should save him. But, if we compare this passage of St. Paul with the rest of the Holy Scriptures, we find a thousand places that will help to set us right, and remove this dangerous error. As that of St. James, for example, *That faith without works is dead ;* that of St. Paul himself, 1 Cor. xiii. *That, though a Man had all faith so as to remove mountains,*

mountains, yet, if he have not charity, or a sincere love of God and his neighbour, it should profit him nothing. And, in short, all those other texts that so frequently injoin the practice of holiness and virtue, and declare the wrath of God against all unrighteousness. So that a man who reads the Scriptures duly will be forced to acknowledge, that this justifying faith, mentioned by St. Paul, must of necessity be attended with an holy life and conversation, otherwise it is altogether impossible it should save us.

So, again, some have concluded from two or three dark passages of Scripture, such as that Rom. ix. 18. *Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth,* and the like. They have concluded, I say, from a few such texts as these, that a man's salvation does not in the least depend upon his own will or endeavour, but that every man is destined, by the absolute decree of God, to happiness or misery eternal. Whereas did they but consider how contrary this opinion is to our natural notions of God as a Being of infinite justice and goodness, and how contradictory it is to the whole tenor of the Scriptures, which represent Almighty God, in so many places, as earnestly desiring the salvation of sinners, not

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willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; it were impossible, I say, for those who duly consider this, to be drawn into that error which we have now mentioned.

Thus then, if there may be some passages in the Scriptures not so easy to be understood, or perhaps liable to misconstruction, a careful comparing of them with some other texts that are more plain, or with the tenor of the Holy Scriptures in general, is undoubtedly the most effectual way to set us right again, and to preserve us from imbibing false opinions. And, indeed, he who reads the Holy Scriptures with due care and diligence, and at the same time with an honest sincerity, and with no other design but that of knowing his duty, in order to the practice of it, though he may not thereby be exempt from all mistake, yet he can never fall into any such mistakes as will be very dangerous to him, or destructive of his salvation. And therefore,

5thly, As another rule to be observed in reading of the Scriptures, be sure to read with an intent to practise. And this is so absolutely necessary, that without it all our reading will be nothing but a vain amusement,
of

of no advantage either to ourselves or others.—
What can it signify for a man to be ever so
well read or knowing in the Scriptures, if, at
the same time, he refuses to live up to what
he knows? Every precept which he meets
with there, and does not practise, will cer-
tainly be converted into a charge against him
at the last day; and the increase of knowledge
will but the more increase his condemnation.
—It is not said, Happy are ye if ye know
these things, *but, if ye know these things, hap-
py are ye if ye do them.* John xiii. 17.

The only design then, with which we
should sit down to read the Holy Scriptures,
should be that of purifying our hearts and
lives by those divine instructions which we
meet with there; to encourage ourselves in
well-doing by the contemplation of those glo-
rious promises which God has made to those
that love and serve him, and to increase our
hatred of impiety and wickedness, from a
view of those unspeakable terrors which are
threatened to all the workers of iniquity; and,
in short, to excite and stir us up to do the will
of God in all things, as we find it there revealed.

And whoever sits down to read the Scrip-
tures, with such a pure intention as this,
will be least of all liable to mistakes in

the reading of them. There seems to be a peculiar promise made to such as these by our Blessed Lord Himself:—*If any man* (says He, John vii. 17.) *will do his will, i. e. will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or no.* A man of upright and sincere intentions, and withal a teachable and humble disposition, who desires nothing more than to know the will of God, in order to the doing of it, shall, by the grace of God, be preserved from falling into any gross delusions, or dangerous mistakes, in matters of religion. This seems to be the meaning of that promise, and we need not doubt of the fulfilling of it. The Royal Psalmist has something very like it, Ps. xxv. 9. *The meek, says He, will be guide in judgment; the meek will He teach his way.*

6. As we are to read the Holy Scriptures with an intent to practise, so we are to remember that it is the rules and precepts of Holy Scripture that we are to copy after, and not merely the examples which we meet with there, any farther than they are reconcilable with these rules and precepts: For as the examples of the best of men are commonly imperfect and deficient, they will be too apt to mislead us, if we trust wholly to example.—

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We must therefore judge of the examples and actions of Abraham, of Jacob, and of King David, and other holy men, that are recorded in the Scriptures, just as we do of that of good men with whom we now live and converse—and imitate such only as are good and warrantable, and agreeable to the rules of the Holy Scripture—and pass by all their errors and defects, as designed, perhaps, to teach us caution, but never meant or intended for our imitation.—For this we are to lay down as a certain truth, that the examples of the best of men will never serve to justify or excuse us in any thing that is bad.

But, lastly,—as a means to make the reading of the Scriptures to be a thing of use and service to us in the conduct of our lives, it will not be amiss for the good Christian to get some texts of Scripture by heart, such I mean as are most instructive and remarkable; to treasure them up in his memory, that he may be able to draw them out upon occasion, and reduce them into practice. I say he that would read the Scriptures to advantage should do well to charge his memory with some of the most plain and practical parts of it; which he may call to mind upon particular occasions,

and apply them to the better regulating of his actions and behaviour.

And this sure is what may be done with ease ; nay, it can hardly be avoided by such as read the Scriptures with that care and diligence as they ought :—It is impossible but some passages at least, especially if they affect or move us in the reading, will remain with us for some time afterward, and make a lasting impression on our minds.

And now the use, that I would advise to make of such remembrances, is not to draw them out, or to make a shew of them in common discourse ; but to apply them, as certain rules and maxims of life, to the ordering and directing of our daily conduct.

And, indeed, the Holy Scriptures furnish us with abundance of the most excellent rules and maxims for our conduct, such as are suited to almost every occasion, every circumstance, and condition of life. For instance, what better rule can we observe in all our dealings with our neighbour, of what kind soever, than that of our Blessed Saviour, Matt. vii. 12. which therefore we ought frequently to call to mind : *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them ?*

If

If at any time we stand provoked by injuries, and incline to passion, or revenge, what can better cool the heat of our resentment, and awake us into charity and forgiveness, than to think of that awful sentence,—*If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses?* Matt. vi. 15. Should we find ourselves careless and remiss in the performance of our duty, slow and negligent in doing good and discharging that great business for which we were sent into the world,—how may we excite our diligence and zeal by calling to mind that saying of our Blessed Lord, *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*

Should we be visited at any time with a sore trouble or affliction, what consolation may it not afford us, what patience may it not teach us, to call to mind these few words of the Apostle, that *the light afflictions of this life are but for a moment, and shall work out for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Who is there that may not support himself under the greatest pressures of want and poverty with that single reflection, that *godliness with contentment is great gain?* 1 Tim. vi. 6.

Last of all, who is there would be guilty of a sin, though he lay under never so strong a temptation to it, did he but call to mind that dreadful admonition which the Holy Scriptures give him, *Know thou that for all these things God shall bring thee into judgment?* Eccles. xi. 9.

And thus we see the use that may be made of having our memory furnished with a set of precepts and admonitions collected together out of those Sacred Writings. They may be as certain rules or maxims of life, which we should resolve to follow and observe in the course of our Christian race, which we may call to mind upon occasion, and, as it were, whisper to ourselves, whensoever they are applicable to our present circumstances, in order to preserve us from the snares of sin, or to excite and quicken, encourage and direct us, in the doing our duty.—

3. I come now, as I proposed, in the third place, to consider the great advantages of being well read or knowing in the Scriptures.

The Apostle has comprized them all under that one article—their being *able to make us wise unto salvation*.—And sure there cannot be imagined a greater commendation of them than

than this, or a more powerful motive to engage us to the reading of them.—

But I shall briefly mention two particulars wherein the reading of the Holy Scriptures may be of the greatest service to us.

As, first, it may be a means to preserve us from error and imposition in matters of religion.

And, secondly, it will afford us the greatest helps and incitements to the practice of a good life.

And, first, a careful reading of the Holy Scriptures may be a means to preserve us from error and imposition in matters of religion.—

For, as the Holy Scriptures are the rule which God hath given us to walk by, all matters of religion must be judged and tried by this rule : And whatsoever contradicts it is by no means to be admitted by a Christian either as a part of his faith or of his duty.—

St. Paul tells the Galatians, Gal. i. 8, 9. *That, if he himself, or even an Angel from heaven, should preach unto them any other Gospel than that which they had received, they were to reject it with abhorrence.*—Nay, he repeats it, *let him be accursed*—plainly intimating, that the Gospel, as it was at first delivered, was to

to be the standard of all Christians faith and practice ever after.—

Since therefore the Holy Scriptures are to be the rule of our faith, as well as the guide of our life, it is necessary for a Christian to acquaint himself with the knowledge of the Scriptures, that he may be able to distinguish truth from falsehood, and may know whether the faith he has embraced be such as God requires or no. Without this, it is certain, a man may be liable to be imposed upon by every false, designing person that will please to try his skill upon him, and may be taught to embrace the most absurd and dangerous errors.

The truth of this is not only clear in reason, but evident in fact.—And it is notorious that the many errors and corruptions which from time to time have crept into the Church of Rome, and have been imposed upon the people of that communion, have been chiefly owing to this as the occasion of them—I mean their want of knowing and understanding the Holy Scriptures. The guides and governors of that church have, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, taken from the people the key of knowledge, by forbidding them to read the Holy Bible, and never suffering that Sacred Book

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to be translated into the vulgar tongue. And by this means they have found it an easy thing to impose upon them whatsoever they pleased, and have, by degrees, introduced all that train of superstitions and corruptions with which their religion abounds. Hence it is that vast numbers of unhappy souls of that communion are deluded into gross idolatry, and, whilst they bow down before a graven image, ignorantly think they do God service, when they are doing that which he forbids. Hence it is that they are taught to place their hopes of everlasting happiness in the merits and intercession of departed Saints, to whom they offer up their daily prayers, and think to go to heaven by virtue of some outward performances, or a little penance inflicted on the body, though they are destitute of all true inward piety and goodness. Hence it is, in short, that they are made to believe that fable of a purgatory, as well as others,—which have no foundation in the Scriptures, and are merely the inventions of designing men.

Such a religion as this, so full of errors and absurdities, could never be imposed with so much ease upon the multitude of Christians which make up that communion, but by taking away the light of the Holy Scriptures from

from them; since every page almost in that Holy Book might have been a means to open their eyes, and hinder them from embracing any impositions so plainly contrary to the Word of God.

It is our peculiar happiness to be allowed, encouraged, and even commanded, to read the Holy Scriptures; and the more we read and study, and the better we understand this Sacred Book, the better shall we be able to hold fast that holy faith which we profess; the more shall we be armed against the sophistry and cunning arguments of such as may endeavour to seduce us, and be ready (as the Apostle advises) to give an answer to every one that shall ask us a reason of the hope that is in us.

But, secondly, as the careful reading of the Holy Scriptures may be a means to preserve us from error and imposition in matters of religion—so it will afford us the greatest helps and incitements to the practice of a good life.

Indeed, every thing in the Holy Scriptures seems to have a tendency to make us better, as often as we read them with a due attention. We there behold the most excellent rules and precepts for an holy life, such as, were they
duly

duly practised, would turn the race of men into a society of Angels here on earth. We are there entertained with some of the most perfect patterns of piety and virtue that ever flourished since the world began, especially that of our Blessed Lord himself, who hath there left us his own most excellent example, to the end that we should follow his steps.— But, above all, the Holy Scriptures lay before us the most powerful arguments and motives to the practice of a good life that it is possible for the imagination of man to conceive. How do they contend (as it were) to draw and allure us into the ways of piety by describing the beauties of holiness, and the deformity of sin; by the dreadful terrors of the wrath of God, and the inexpressible advantages of his grace and favour; by all the joys of heaven, and all the pains of hell?

Such amazing promises and threats, delivered with that natural plainness and simplicity, and, at the same time, with such high authority, as we find them scattered up and down the Holy Scriptures, cannot but awaken the minds of those that read them into a happy sense of the importance of an holy life, and the great danger of every sinful course; and will, undoubtedly, if well pursued, make them

them very diligent and careful to avoid the one, and to perfect themselves in the practice of the other.—A person who is duly conversant with the Holy Scriptures will there, as in a glass, behold his own picture, the true image of his soul; will see as well what he is as what he ought to be, and will thereby be both enabled and excited to correct whatever is amiss.—In a word, as he studies those Divine Oracles with care and much devotion, his life will, by degrees, become a perfect transcript and copy of what he reads; and, by having his eyes thus constantly fixed upon that unerring rule before him which describes his way to heaven, he will go on the more securely in his way, till he arrive at last to that place of rest and happiness eternal.

And now what remains, but, in the fourth and last place, to draw a single inference by way of application of what has been said, and so conclude.

Since, therefore, the Holy Scriptures are thus completely calculated to make us wise unto salvation, let me earnestly recommend to every one of you that excellent advice which our Blessed Saviour once delivered to the Jews, Search the Scriptures. Be as careful to peruse the Holy Bible, and read it with as
much

much attention and regard, as you would the deed or instrument that should convey a title to you of any large estate, nay, of a whole kingdom, or all the kingdoms of the world. For, indeed, the Scriptures do much more—They are the great charter of your everlasting salvation.

Of all the judgments and calamities denounced by the Prophets, that of the Prophet Amos seems to be one of the greatest, where he threatens a famine of the Word of God, Amos viii. 11. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing of the Words of the Lord.* The being deprived of the use and benefit of the Holy Scriptures is, without question, an unspeakable calamity; but what is it then, when we deprive ourselves of this advantage, and, though we have the Holy Bible in our keeping, make none, or very little use at all of it?

There is a remarkable passage in the Book of Nehemiah, which (I think) it is impossible for any one to read attentively without being greatly moved and affected with it, as it shews us that religious affection and regard
which

which the Jews had for the Book of their Law.

The story, in short, is this :—

The people of the Jews, during that long captivity in which they had been held by the Kings of Babylon, had been deprived of reading and hearing the Holy Scriptures.—When Nehemiah, therefore, was sent back with leave to build Jerusalem, the Book of the Law, which had so long lain by neglected, was brought out with great pomp and ceremony, and read in the ears of all the people. The devout manner of reading it, and the religious attention and becoming reverence with which it was heard, are excellently described in the following words, Neh. viii. 4, &c.

And Ezra the Scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which was made for that purpose.—

And Ezra opened the Book in the sight of all the people, and, when he opened it, all the people stood up.

And Ezra blessed the Lord, the Great God; and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

But

But the most moving circumstance of all is that which follows, *that all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.* They wept (no doubt) for joy, that they were once again restored to that invaluable privilege of hearing and being taught the Word of God.—and how great, how universal, must that joy be, which could even draw tears from the eyes of such a multitude?—For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Happy were it, if we could persuade the generality of Christians to have the same pious regard for the Book of God; that they would be often mindful to take it up, and read therein with all devout attention, and lay up the words thereof in their hearts, and in their souls.—And may we not only lay up the Word of God in our memories, but labour to bring forth the happy fruits of it in our lives and conversation—that so that Sacred Book, which was given to make us wise unto salvation, may never rise up against us, and condemn us at the last day; when, as the Scriptures tell us, the Books shall be opened, and the dead, both small and great, shall be judged out of those things which were written in the Books, according to their works.

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How will it amaze the wretched sinner, in the day of Judgment, when that Book, which he had all his life, perhaps, contemned and disobeyed, shall be opened full in his view, and present him with a sight of that most dreadful and amazing doom, which is now just going to be pronounced upon him for his disobedience! How frightful will those characters appear, where once, perhaps, he might have read his title to eternal happiness, but now can perceive nothing but tokens of horror and a sentence of eternal condemnation!

I have neither time nor inclination to pursue this melancholy thought.—I could only wish, that it may excite us to a greater care and diligence in the study of the Holy Scriptures, that, so improving more and more in the knowledge and practice of our duty here in this life, we may not fail of finally obtaining the blessed inheritance of the life to come.

Which God, &c.

S E R M O N II.

I Tim. ii. 5, 6.

*For there is one God, and one Mediator between
God and men, the Man Christ Jesus :*

Who gave himself a ransom for all.

THAT there is a God, and that He is but one, is what we learn, both from the light of reason and the Holy Scriptures.

But that there is likewise a Mediator between God and man,—that this Mediator is but one,—and that the true and only Mediator is the Man Christ Jesus—These are points of which the Gospel only can inform us, and which were never perfectly revealed, till that Mediator came into the world.

As this, therefore, is a doctrine of great importance to Christianity, and upon which our faith and hope, as Christians, appears to rest : I shall endeavour to explain it in the following discourse—by inquiring,

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First, into the proper notion of a Mediator, and shewing what it is to be a Mediator between God and man.

Secondly, How far the notion of a Mediator had prevailed amongst mankind before the coming of our Blessed Saviour.

Thirdly, That the Blessed Jesus was the true and only Mediator betwixt God and man, and wherein his mediatorial office principally consists.

First, then, I am to inquire into the proper notion of a Mediator, and shew what it is to be a Mediator between God and man.

The proper notion of a Mediator, according to the natural import of the word, is one who stands in a middle office or capacity betwixt two differing parties, and has a power of transacting every thing betwixt them, and of reconciling them the one to the other:— And thus a Mediator betwixt God and man is one whose office properly it is to mediate and transact affairs betwixt them, relating to the favour of Almighty God, and the duty and the happiness of man.

Thus Moses was, in some sense, a Mediator, and is so called (Gal. iii. 19.) with respect to the people of Israel—because it was by
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by him that God was pleased to deliver them from the Egyptian bondage, and to make a covenant that He would be their God, and they should be his people: And the Law was given them through his hands,—though, in a strict sense, even Moses was but a type or representative of a greater Mediator, and that Law a shadow of good things to come (as the Apostle speaks): So that, in truth and propriety, there never was but one Mediator betwixt God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all,—as the Apostle adds in my text,—who, by offering up his life upon the cross, procured the terms of pardon and reconciliation for us with his Heavenly Father, and became the Mediator of a better covenant.—And therefore it is through His mediation only, that we are admitted to the presence and favour of God, and no man cometh to the Father, but by Him.

And, having thus briefly stated the true notion of a Mediator,—I proceed to the

Second thing proposed, which is to inquire how far the notion of a Mediator had prevailed amongst mankind, before the coming of our Blessed Saviour.

And here, if we carefully consult the Holy Scriptures, we shall find the notion of a Mediator to be as old as Adam, and to be introduced by God Himself immediately after the fall.

For, when the first man had transgressed the Law of God in Paradise, and made himself a sinful creature,—he was no longer permitted to approach Almighty God in the same manner as he had done before in his state of innocence, or to address him immediately and in his own name, but only through the intercession and mediation of another person. The infinite purity and holiness of God, and the sinfulness and impurity that was now become inherent in the nature of man, rendered it a thing impossible, or unsuitable (at least) to the majesty and wisdom of God, that any intercourse should be maintained betwixt them but through a Mediator only; who, by his powerful intercession, might render the Creator, once again, propitious to his sinful creatures.

And such a Mediator God Himself was therefore pleased in mercy to appoint, as soon as ever man had fallen,—when He had no sooner passed the sentence on him for his disobedience in breaking of the first covenant, than
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He was pleased to re-admit him to a second covenant established upon other terms,—wherein having given him the gracious promise of a Mediator or Redeemer, a person that in due time should be born into the world, to make an atonement both for his transgression and for all the sins of men, He bids him, from thenceforward, to believe and hope in this Mediator: This being the only means whereby it was possible for him to be reconciled to the Divine grace and favour, and to obtain another Paradise instead of that which he had lost.

And this is what is justly thought to be implied in that promise, Gen. iii. 15. that *the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*:—That is, that there should, some time or other, be born of the posterity of Eve a Redeemer, who, by making satisfaction for the sins of men, and reconciling them to the mercy of Almighty God, should thereby bruise the head of that old serpent, the Devil, who had beguiled our first parents into sin, and, in a great measure, destroy his empire and dominion amongst men.

And thus it became a necessary part of Adam's religion after the fall, as well as that

of his posterity after him, to worship God through hopes in this Mediator or Redeemer.

And, to keep up the remembrance of it, God was pleased, at this time, to appoint sacrifices of expiation or atonement for sin, to be observed through all succeeding generations, till the Redeemer Himself should come, who was to make the true and only proper satisfaction and atonement.

The skins with which God is said to have clothed the nakedness of our first parents (Gen. iii. 21.) are justly believed to be the skins of beasts that had been offered by them in sacrifice,—and this (no doubt by the express command of God) as an atonement for their sins.

And, in the very next chapter, we find the two sons of Adam, Cain and Abel, bringing each of them an offering to the Lord,—but with this remarkable difference, that God is said to have respect to Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect,—Gen. iv. 4, 5.

The reason whereof is told us by the Apostle to the Hebrews, ch. xi. 4. *By faith (says he) Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that*

that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts.

By faith Abel offered—It was this, then, that made the difference betwixt his sacrifice and Cain's, that the one offered by faith, the other did not—by faith, that is, in the Mediator or Redeemer.

And this difference appeared in the very nature of their gifts or offerings:—For Cain offered only of the fruits of the ground,—no living creature as an atonement for sin, and whose blood was to be shed for the remission of it.—It was the sacrifices of this sort only that had a power to take away the guilt of sin, and that by virtue of faith in the Mediator or Redeemer, of whom they were appointed as memorials.—Cain therefore, by neglecting to offer such a sacrifice as this, behaved as if he had no sin at all to be atoned for, or no belief in the Mediator or Redeemer; and hence that reproof of God to him, Gen. iv. 7. *If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? And, if thou dost not well, sin lieth at the door.* That is, if thou wert in all respects innocent and upright, without any the least sin to answer for, then, indeed, there would be no need for thee to offer a sacrifice of atonement, for thou mightest be accepted without

without it : But, if thou art a sinful creature, —if, in any instance whatsoever, thou dost not well, then thou shouldst have offered a sacrifice of atonement for thy sin, and applied to God for mercy, through faith in the Mediator or Redeemer, of whom such sacrifices were appointed as the memorials : Otherwise thy sin still lieth at thy door, and will be required of thee.

Here, then, we see the difference betwixt Cain and Abel's sacrifice, and therein the plain footsteps of the doctrine of a Mediator or Redeemer :—That Abel, conscious of his fallen state and the now sinful condition of man, offered a living creature to God, *the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof*, (as it is there said) which was to be slain by way of atonement for sin, and as a type, a representative, a memorial of the promised Mediator : And therefore Abel is said to have offered in faith, and God had respect to his offering, and accepted it.—But the offering brought by Cain had no such qualities ; there was no blood shed, no expiation made for sin, nor any acknowledgment of it ; it was not made in faith, had no respect to the Mediator or Redeemer, and it was for this reason God had no respect to him, or to his offer-

offering.—And may we not, in this example, see a lively picture, on the one hand, of the humble and devout Christian, who, after all his most sincere and diligent endeavours in an holy life, yet, conscious of his own infirmities, relies upon the merits of a Saviour: And, on the other hand, of those who either ascribe too much to their own merits, or by a fatal blindness overlook and undervalue that only true propitiatory sacrifice that was ever offered for the sins of men, that only method of atonement through which God hath declared he will be reconciled to sinners?—It is remarkable, in the instance before us, that the most innocent person of the two was the freest to acknowledge his transgressions, and has thereby left us an example of humility as well as faith—*being dead, he yet speaketh.*

I have been the more particular in considering this instance, because it gives us a plain account of the origin of sacrifices and the true intent and design of them—that they had evidently a respect to the Mediator or Redeemer.—And, indeed, common reason may tell us, that they must needs have a further respect than the bare offering itself—for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats (as the
Apostle

Apostle argues) to take away sin, by any virtue of their own—Almighty God has certainly no need of them; for *all the beasts of the field are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.*

—It is remarkable that the proper sacrifice of atonement was intirely burnt and consumed—no part of it was ever eaten or made use of.—It is called, indeed, in the language of Holy Scripture, an offering of a sweet-smelling favour unto the Lord; but sure none can be so weak as to imagine, that there was any thing, in the mere smell of the burnt-offering, that could be at all sweet or pleasing to the Deity—It was highly acceptable to him, indeed; but in no other respect than as it was his own appointment, and attended with the prayers and supplication, the faith, humility, and sincere repentance of those who offered it; and as it was a memorial of the Ever-blessed Redeemer—that *Lamb of God*, (as he is called in the New Testament, in allusion to these sacrifices) who was in due time to be manifested, that He might take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Thus then the custom of sacrificing, which appears to have been so early practised by Adam and his sons of the very next generation, sufficiently shews that hope they had in a Mediator or Redeemer, who should, in due time,

time, atone the justice of Almighty God by shedding of his blood for finners, and thereby make way for their pardon and reconciliation.—And that the notion of a Mediator betwixt God and man obtained, in after times and ages of the world, appears plain from those remarkable footsteps of it which we meet with in the religion of the Heathen nations, as well as Jews.

It is well known that among the Heathen nations the custom of sacrificing was, in a manner, universal, and made a very considerable part of their worship or religion:—Now we have already seen, that sacrifices, in their original design and institution, are manifestly founded in the notion of a Mediator.

—But, beside this, there was another thing observable in the religious worship of the Heathens, which seems to have been nothing else but a most gross corruption of the true and ancient notion of a Mediator—I mean the multitude of Deities they worshipped as Mediators betwixt God and man.

For, though with them (as St. Paul speaks) there were many that were called Gods, yet they generally allowed but of one Supreme, and considered all the rest as subordinate and dependent on him—and therefore they usually
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addressed themselves to these as a sort of mediatory Beings betwixt the Great God and themselves—just as some Christians, now a-days, grossly corrupted in their worship, address themselves to Saints and Angels, or the Blessed Virgin, to present their prayers, or intercede for them with God ;—for the superstition is much the same, however they may palliate or excuse it.

As to the religion instituted by God Himself, and delivered to the Israelites by the hand of Moses, we therein observe still clearer footsteps of the great doctrine of a Mediator.

It is true the Mediator or Redeemer was not yet revealed, nor had the Israelites any other notice of him than only as a person promised them, to be revealed in time to come :—But, nevertheless, the whole frame and structure of their religion was contrived in such a manner as to point or shadow out to them the Mediator or Redeemer.

Their daily sacrifices were appointed as continual types and representations of that one great sacrifice that was to be once offered up on the cross for the sins of all mankind.—Their High Priest, who was to make atonement for the people,—was no other than a type of that High Priest who was, in after times,

times, revealed to make atonement for us by his own blood.—And, if the High Priest under the Law was permitted, once a-year, to enter into the Holy of Holies, there to appear before the presence of the God of heaven, and to intercede with Him for the people of Israel, the Holy Scriptures will inform us, that all this was intended for no other end or purpose but to foreshew and point out that High Priest who, after he had offered up Himself a sacrifice for sinners, ascended up into the highest heavens, there to appear in the presence of God for us, and to continue for ever to make intercession for us with his Father.

So that, in short, the whole scheme of Divine worship, prescribed and enjoined by the Law of Moses to the people of Israel, appears to have been thus contrived by the Divine wisdom, with reference to that great and fundamental point of religion, the doctrine of a Mediator.

Add to all this the many plain and express prophecies from time to time delivered to that people, and which gave them still clearer evidence and notice of the Mediator or Redeemer that was to come—prophecies so very clear and plain, and which pointed out to them so exactly the manner, circumstances, and even the

the very time of his appearing, together with all those things he was to do and suffer here on earth—that, had they not been the most perverse and blinded people in the world, they could not possibly have missed of knowing and acknowledging him, when he came—they could not have rejected, and reviled, and crucified the Lord of life as they did, and so become the wicked instruments themselves of fulfilling what their own prophecies so expressly foretold concerning Him.

I might now proceed to the third general head of this discourse—to shew that the Blessed Jesus was the true and only Mediator betwixt God and man, and wherein his mediatorial office principally consists :

But I shall close up this discourse with a brief reflection on what has been said, and a few texts of Scripture, which may both receive light from it, and give light unto it.

Known unto God (says the Apostle) are all His works from the beginning of the world.— And we have seen from the foregoing discourse, that this great work of His, the redemption of mankind by our Saviour Christ, was known to God, and appointed by him, from the very time that man transgressed and stood in need of a Mediator and Redeemer.

And hence it is that God's intention to send his Son into the world, for the salvation of mankind, is so often called, in Holy Scripture, God's purpose, which He had purposed from the beginning—what He had fore-ordained, appointed, and predestinated, to use the Scripture phrase.—And, this indeed, is the true Scripture notion of predestination; not any absolute unconditional decrees of saving such and such particular persons; but only God's general decree of sending his Son into the world, that they who will believe his doctrines, and obey his precepts, may be saved through Him.

And hence it is that He is called *the Lamb of God, which was slain from the foundation of the world*:—All the sacrifices that were slain by the worshippers of the true God, from the beginning of the world, by way of expiation or atonement for sin, being no other (as you have heard) than as so many figures and memorials of that great sacrifice, which was, in due time, once for all, to be offered upon the cross for the redemption of mankind:—For this end were they appointed by Almighty God; to this they had a reference, and from this alone received all their virtue and efficacy.—And even the sacrifices practised by the Hea-

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then nations, though overlaid with ignorance and superstition, and though they had forgot the true design of them, yet, as the custom was in a manner universal, it affords a noble proof or testimony to the doctrine of a Mediator or Redeemer, who had been promised from the beginning, and of whom sacrifices were appointed as memorials.—Hence likewise we see the meaning of that passage of St. Paul, 1 Cor. viii. 6. *Though there be (says he) which are called Gods, whether in heaven or earth, (as there are Gods many, and Lords many)* alluding to that multitude of Deities that were worshipped by the Heathen nations:

Yet to us (says he) to us Christians, there is but one God, the Father, (the great Creator and Governor of the world) of whom are all things, and we in Him: And one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him: By whom God both made the world and redeemed it, and through whom, as our Mediator, we are reconciled unto him:—For thus God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

Hence likewise we see a reason why we are commanded to put up all our prayers to God in the Name and Mediation of our Saviour Christ:—*If ye ask any thing in my name (says our*

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our Saviour) *He beareth you.*—And again, *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

And so the Apostles exhort Christians to pray and give thanks to God, always, and for all things, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason is, that as our Saviour Christ, in what He did and suffered for us, is the only propitiation for our sins; so is He the only Advocate and Mediator through whom and whose most powerful intercession, God will permit sinful creatures to approach Him.

The pride of man may find something to object, perhaps, against this method.—But, nevertheless, pride was not made for man, much less for fallen man, and in his present sinful and degenerate estate.—If he thinks that God must pardon his sins, upon his repentance and amendment, without applying to a Saviour, or laying hold upon that only method of atonement set before us in the Gospel: He presumes upon the mercy of God without grounds, and in direct opposition to his declared will—nay, he goes contrary to the general sense of mankind, who have always believed, that, when they had transgressed the Law of God, beside their repentance and amendment,

some atonement was necessary to appease the Deity towards them. What that atonement is we Christians cannot be at a loss to seek, since we find it in every page almost of the New Testament.—It is true, indeed, that, without a hearty and sincere repentance, and the diligent endeavours of an holy life, no Christian must hope to have his sins forgiven: For this would be directly contrary to the very design of our Blessed Saviour's coming into the world.

But neither with our repentance must we hope to be accepted, but only through the merits and mediation of our Blessed Saviour.

The sum of all is this:—That as the Gospel of our Saviour lays the highest obligation on us to lead good lives, without which we only play the hypocrite with God, and provoke his justice: So if we do our endeavour to do our duty with an honest diligence and sincerity, and study to conform our lives to those rules which God hath set us in the Gospel:—*If we walk in the light* (says the Apostle) *as he is in the light, we know that the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.* And as the most perfect Christian, after all his best endeavours, will be still liable to some sins, so, the better any Christian is, the more sensible will

will he be of his failings and infirmities. Here is that never-failing anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, (as the Scripture speaks) and upon which it may rest itself with comfort and security; I mean that faith and hope in a Mediator, which is the great privilege of our Christianity:—For *if any man sin* (says St. John) *we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins*:—Who, by his death upon the cross, having made the only proper satisfaction and atonement for sin, *is for ever sat down on the right hand of God—where he is able to save them, to the uttermost, who come unto God by him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.*—

I come now to the third general head of this discourse—to shew that the Blessed Jesus was the true and only Mediator betwixt God and Man, and wherein his Mediatorial office principally consists.

We have a strong concurring argument for it from what has been already said:—For if the notion of a Mediator had so generally prevailed amongst mankind before the coming of our Blessed Saviour—if in the religion God Himself established amongst his own people, for about two thousand years before, he was

shadowed out to them under types and other figurative representations, and yet more clearly described in the prophecies of after times—He in whom all those types and prophecies concurred, and had their full completion, must doubtless be the true Mediator:—And thus they all concurred (it is certain) in the person of the Blessed Jesus.

Now his Mediatorial office principally consisted in procuring for us peace and reconciliation with Almighty God.

But to this end the following things were necessary:—

First, that He should take our nature upon Him, and become man—that so whatever He should do or suffer, being done by him as man, might be available to us men for our salvation—and as the first Adam, by sinning in our nature, brought sin and misery on his whole posterity—so it was necessary that our Blessed Lord, the second Adam, should take our nature on Him, in order to redeem us from it.

And this He did by his suffering on the cross, when he gave Himself (as my text expresses it) a ransom for all—the dignity of his person, as the only begotten Son of God, adding a merit to his sufferings, that rendered him

the only fit Mediator to intercede with God for man, and to reconcile us to his Heavenly Father.—

And hence it is that the forgiveness of our sins is so often in Holy Scripture attributed to the death of Christ, as the only meritorious cause thereof:—He is there said to have washed us from our sins in his own blood—to bear our sins upon the cross—and to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself:—Expressions plainly signifying, that the death of Christ was, in a proper sense, an atonement for the sins of men. The whole work of our redemption is, in short, ascribed to this, and whatsoever He was enabled to do for us as our Mediator stands upon the same foundation.—It was by virtue of this all-sufficient sacrifice that He obtained eternal redemption for us (as the Apostle to the Hebrews speaks): And hence likewise it is that St. Paul, after he had told us in my text, that the only Mediator betwixt God and man is the man Christ Jesus, immediately adds these words:—*Who gave Himself a Ransom for all*—plainly intimating to us, that the whole ground of his mediation was the giving Himself as a ransom for mankind, and paying the price of their

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redemption (as it is elsewhere said) in his own blood.

Nor can we be inclined, surely, to think this a small price, when we consider the dignity of the person paying it.—Whatever He was pleased to suffer, as the Son of Man, must needs be infinitely meritorious, because He was the Son of God too. The union of the Divine and human natures, in the person of our Blessed Saviour, is one of these incomprehensible mysteries which we shall never here in this life perfectly understand; and therefore it behoves us to speak of it with caution and with reverence.—But, whatever were the manner of that union, we are sure the two natures still remained distinct—nor was it possible for the glorious Majesty of God to suffer any thing by being united to the human nature in our Blessed Saviour. No: It was the manhood only suffered, as St. Paul plainly intimates to us in my text, by saying it was the man Christ Jesus that gave Himself a ransom for all:—And, having thus fully atoned the justice of God for the sins of men by that meritorious sacrifice He offered on the cross, He was hereby authorized to offer pardon and salvation to all such as would repent, and believe his Gospel, and obey it.

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Our Blessed Saviour, having thus purged our sins (as the Apostle speaks, Heb. i. 3.) *sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

It is there He continues still to discharge the office of a Mediator, by interceding for us with his Father, and pleading the merits of his most precious blood in our behalf, and to the obtaining pardon and remission of our sins.—Hence it is that we are required to put up all our prayers to God in his name, and to hope for every blessing at his hands through the alone merits and mediation of our Blessed Saviour.—And thus we see wherein the Mediatorial office of our Blessed Lord consists: And I hope there needs no more be said for the explication of that great doctrine laid before us in my text.

All that remains for me, in the last place, is to draw a few practical inferences from what has been said.

And, first, how ought we to adore the wisdom and goodness of Almighty God, who, when mankind were fallen from that state of happiness which he had placed them in at first, would not suffer us however to perish everlastingly, but contrived that gracious method of our redemption, and prepared a Mediator for us, in whom we might be reconciled to Him
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again, and be admitted to the hope of pardon and salvation.—This, as it was the greatest instance of Divine mercy that was ever manifested to the world, so ought it to create within us gratitude and thanksgiving to the highest pitch imaginable.

But, secondly, since we have such a Mediator in the court of heaven—one who is for ever seated at the right hand of God to make intercession for us—how should we delight on all occasions to offer up our prayers to God through him—and to approach the Throne of Grace with all humble assurance that our prayers will be accepted through the merits and mediation of our Blessed Saviour.—It is the promise He Himself was pleased to give to his Disciples:—*Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, (says he) believing, ye shall receive.*—And again, *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* What an encouragement is here for every pious and devout Christian to be frequent in the exercise of prayer, as well private as public, when they consider that they have such a powerful Advocate in heaven, who will be sure to present all their requests before his Heavenly Father, and to add his own prevailing intercession to render them effectual.—How should

should this, I say, encourage us on all occasions to offer up our prayers to God through Him, and his Mediation only:—For,

Thirdly, if there be but one Mediator only betwixt God and man (as our Apostle says expressly) even Christ Jesus—hence we cannot but perceive the folly and impiety of that practice of the Romanists, the worshipping of Saints and Angels as Mediators.—This is to detract most shamefully from the merits of our Blessed Saviour, who, as He was the only person that hath made atonement for us by his blood, so He is the only person that hath power to intercede for us in heaven by virtue of that atonement.—And to employ any other, therefore, as intercessors, to present our prayers to God, to worship them as Mediators betwixt God and us, is to deprive our Saviour of that honour which belongs to Him alone, and which He has purchased with his blood—I mean that of being our only Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor with his Heavenly Father.

And hence it is that the Apostle justly calls such a practice as this a sort of denial or renouncing of Christ, Col. ii. 18. *Let no man beguile you of your reward (says he) in a voluntary humility and worshipping of Angels—not holding*

holding the Head; i. e. not holding Christ, who is the proper Head of the church; but rejecting and renouncing Him, whilst you take to yourselves Angels for your Mediators—and, if not Angels, much less Saints departed, were they never so truly Saints, and were it possible for us to be sure of it, which we cannot:—So that this practice is, in the Apostle's sense, (we see) little less than downright apostasy from Christ, and therefore sufficiently dangerous, were it in no other respect sinful and idolatrous.

Again, fourthly, as to us Christians there is but one God, and one Mediator only; so ought there to be amongst us, as much as may be, an unity in all respects—an unity of heart and mind, of faith and worship, of charity and affection.

This is an inference which the Apostles themselves have touched upon in more than one or two places of their Epistles:—Let us endeavour (says St. Paul) *to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*:—For *there is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*, Eph. iv. 3, &c.—From hence, then, we learn, that
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it is the duty of a Christian to hold communion with his fellow Christians, as far as he lawfully may:—And that nothing is more contrary to the true spirit and temper of the Gospel, than perverse and causeless separations and divisions.

But, lastly, since we have such a Mediator and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, in whom we may be reconciled to God, let us beware how we indulge ourselves in any of those evil practices which may frustrate the design of that his Mediation—and, after all that hath been done to save us, may for ever disappoint us of salvation.

In vain is all the mercy of the Gospel offered to us, if we resolve to go on in the ways of sin.—In vain did Christ become our Mediator to reconcile us unto God, if we still continue enemies against Him, and refuse to be reconciled.—Let us then instantly forsake those sins which separate betwixt God and us, and, as we hope for pardon and salvation thro' the merits of our Redeemer, let us endeavour to qualify ourselves for it by faith, repentance, and holiness of life:—Which God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

S E R M O N III.

Matt. xi. 28, 29.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

THESE are the kind and most affectionate terms wherein the Saviour of the world addresses himself to every unreclaimed sinner, and would invite and persuade him to become his disciple.

The Jewish Doctors, the Scribes and Pharisees, who, in our Saviour's days, were the great teachers of the Law of Moses, were, for the most part, so very proud and supercilious, that they despised all those who seemed to have less piety than themselves, and scorned so much as to converse with publicans and sinners.—On the other hand, the Blessed Jesus, who came on purpose to call sinners to re-

repentance, took all opportunities to converse with, to instruct, and to reclaim them.—He invites them earnestly to hear and learn of Him, as of a teacher mild and gentle, meek and lowly;—one who desired nothing more, than to rid them of that guilt and terror which their sins had brought upon them, and to put them in a way of being easy, safe, and happy :

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

It shall be my design, in the following discourse,

1. To explain the meaning and importance of the several phrases here used by our Blessed Saviour,—and shew what it is to *come unto Him*,—to *take his yoke upon us*,—and to *learn of Him*.

2. I shall consider the blessing or advantage here promised to such as do so: *Ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

1. Then, for the several phrases here used: They are only different expressions of one and the same thing,—and to come to Christ, to take his yoke upon us, and to learn of Him,

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is, in general, no more than this,—to become the true disciples of the Blessed Jesus,—to follow those divine instructions he has left us in the Gospel, and to approve ourselves good Christians. In short, the full meaning of the several expressions here used may be comprized in these two general duties,—to believe the doctrines, and obey the precepts of the Gospel; it is to believe, and to live like Christians.—

And there is a mutual relation betwixt these two duties,—so that it is impossible to lead a truly Christian life without a firm belief of the doctrines of Christianity; as, on the other hand, it will be in vain that we believe its doctrines, unless our life be answerable to that belief.

And, indeed, nothing is more plain, than that the great truths revealed to us in the Gospel were designed to regulate our practice and reform our lives,—to curb the exorbitant appetites and passions of men, which lead them into every vice; and to make them just, and good, and temperate,—and humble, and pure, and perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect.—Even that great and comfortable doctrine of Christianity, the forgiveness of sins through the merits of Christ, was intended

tended to lead men to repentance and to newness of life, without which it will but aggravate their condemnation in the day of judgment.—In a word, they alone shall be reckoned in the number of good Christians at the last day, who make it their daily study to adorn that faith which they profess by an innocent, and upright, and a truly Christian life.—It is to this, more especially, our Blessed Saviour calls us, when he bids us come unto Him, take his yoke upon us, and learn of Him;—his doctrines, his example, his commands and precepts, are all directed to this great and necessary point, to make us truly good and virtuous.—This is to be his *disciples*, indeed, when we *do whatsoever he commands us*, John. xv. 14. and it is to such as these alone that the promise in my text belongs:—

Ye shall find rest unto your souls.

And this brings me to the second thing proposed,—to consider the blessing or advantage here promised to the good Christian;—and that is (undoubtedly) the greatest blessing this world can afford,—a promise of rest, of peace and satisfaction to their souls.

The rest here promised by our Blessed Saviour seems to be meant in opposition to that

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trouble and uneasiness, that restlessness and anxiety of heart, which usually attend a course of sin;—and, indeed, the happiness and pleasure of a religious life never appears with so much advantage, as when we compare it with the evils and calamities to which a wicked life would certainly expose us.

That we may therefore see the truth and certainty of our Blessed Saviour's promise in my text,—the happiness of taking his yoke upon us,—and the great advantage of a truly Christian life,—we need only to consider the following particulars.

1. That this will free us from that trouble and vexation that usually attend a course of sin.

2. It will deliver us from the terrors and upbraidings of a guilty conscience.

And, last of all, it will afford the greatest comfort and encouragement at the hour of death.

1. Then, one great advantage of a truly Christian life is this,—that it will free men from that trouble and vexation that usually attend a course of sin.

For whoever thinks the ways of sin to be all over pleasure and enjoyment will quickly find himself mistaken, if he be so unhappy
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as to make the trial:—Whatever happiness it may seem to promise at a distance, it generally deludes the expectation, and leaves a man nothing in the end but disappointment and vexation.

But then the evils which it brings upon the soul are certain and unavoidable. Every vice a man indulges is (as it were) a distemper of the mind, which, like those of the body, seldom fails to give him pain or great uneasiness.—What is it, indeed, that creates the greatest disturbances in the minds of men, but their own sinful lusts and passions cherished and indulged? Pride or covetousness, or envy or malice, or ambition, wheresoever they are suffered to prevail but singly in the bosom of a Christian, are enough to destroy the whole peace of his mind and the happiness of his life:—How much more, then, when they meet together, as they sometimes do in the bosom of a wicked man, and raise a tempest there, and he becomes the sport (as it were) of many boisterous and unruly passions all at once.

The Prophet has given us a very lively description of a wicked man under these circumstances, whom he compares to a raging and tempestuous sea:—*The wicked* (says he)

are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Is. lvii. 20.

In short, one who is deeply engaged in the ways of sin is always a stranger to the ways of peace,—I mean that true inward peace of mind which is so necessary to the happiness and enjoyment of life. His will becomes depraved, his understanding weak, his passions headstrong and unruly;—his thoughts and his affections are oftentimes distracted betwixt an infinite variety of vain pursuits, and, whilst he seeks to gratify his sinful inclinations, he loses the repose and quiet of his soul.

But, above all, the greatest trouble and vexation of a sinful course is that which usually arises from the painful reflections of a bad conscience and the sense of guilt unpardoned;—it is this that fills sinners with the greatest terror, and destroys their peace and happiness.

It was a very just observation of the wise Man, that all other evils and calamities of life might be borne with and supported, but the rebukes of an injured conscience are even intolerable:—*A wounded spirit* (says he) *who can bear?*

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Now this is commonly the lot of every wicked man at one time or another ; and, the longer that he puts it from him, the heavier will it fall upon him at the last.

But it is the great advantage of a truly Christian life, that it delivers men from the rebukes and terrors of a guilty conscience ;—it secures to them the favour of that God whose loving-kindness is better than life itself, and whose favour is infinitely more to be valued than all that this world can afford us. What inexpressible delight and satisfaction must it be to the good Christian, to consider himself as reconciled to God as intitled to his mercy and forgiveness, and admitted to the blessed hope and expectation of eternal happiness,—and this upon the best and surest grounds, a firm belief of the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, and the conscience of an upright heart and life, and a sincere and diligent endeavour to discharge his duty ?

It is (no doubt) a very great pleasure to look back upon the past actions of a good life.—As sinful actions naturally leave a sting behind them, and create a very bitter remembrance in the soul ; so the pleasure of a good deed still remains and dwells with us ; it leaves a grateful relish in the mind, and every

new remembrance yields a fresh delight and satisfaction.

In a word, it must needs afford matter of joy and comfort, when, upon a serious review of his life past, a man finds that he hath studied to discharge his duty both to God and man, and to answer that great end for which he was sent into the world.—This will undoubtedly afford a just and noble satisfaction in every state and condition of life: It will greatly heighten his enjoyments, and prove the best support to him under all afflictions and calamities whatsoever.—How light, indeed, may those afflictions seem, which are but for a moment, to one who has the chearful hope and prospect of a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? This is sufficient to sustain him under the worst of evils that can possibly befall him here in this life:—*Our rejoicing is this* (says St. Paul) *the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*—The good Christian, in the most afflicted state that is, may here repose himself with comfort and security, and will be sure to find some rest unto his soul.

3. And last of all, the great advantage of a truly Christian life is chiefly seen and experienced

rienced at the hour of death.—It is then that it affords the greatest comfort and encouragement, when we stand most of all in need of it. In that dark and gloomy season, when it is in vain to seek for succour from the things without us; when the busy scene of this world, which had so long amused our thoughts, begins to vanish like a dream, and we see all its joys flying from us: What is there that can give ease or comfort to the mind in this trial like the remembrance of a life well spent, the peaceful remembrance of a good conscience, the sense of God Almighty's favour, and the chearful hopes of everlasting happiness?

It was, we know, the prayer of Balaam in Holy Scripture, though no righteous man himself, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his.* And we need not doubt but this too is the secret wish and desire of the generality of wicked men:—How averse soever they may be to the practice of religion while they live, yet they would be glad to find the comfort and satisfaction of it, when they come to die.

It is then, indeed, that men commonly begin to see the folly of a wicked life, when it is, perhaps, too late either to remedy or

recall it ;—and what astonishment and horror must the thought of this create within them ? It is impossible (surely) to describe the torment and confusion of a guilty wretch alarmed at once with the terrors of approaching death, and the too just apprehensions of damnation.—How will it distract his very soul to think that he is now about to leave the world, and must for ever bid adieu to those enjoyments in which he placed his whole felicity ;—that he is going where he has nothing to hope for, but the most dreadful things to fear. Where can he turn his thoughts in this extremity ? To what shall he fly for refuge ? Or whence is it that he can draw the least spark of joy or comfort ? Shall he look back upon his past life ? Alas ! this can only serve to heighten and increase his torment, whilst it brings a thousand things to remembrance which he could wish might be for ever forgotten.—Shall he look forward to the life to come ? But this must needs appear terrible, indeed, to one who has no expectations there of any thing but misery.—Shall he lift up his eyes to heaven, and implore succour and relief from thence ?—Alas, with what face can he now address his prayers to Him, whom he had all his life before neglected and provoked ?

voked? He sees infinite reason to dread his justice, but little or no cause to expect his mercy.—Thus every thing contributes to render the wicked man completely miserable at his death,—and, if his conscience chance, at that time, to be thoroughly awakened, what agonies and torment must it give him? Unhappy state of obstinate sinners! they see their guilt, and dread their danger, when, perhaps, it is too late to deplore the one, or to escape the other;—a torment that in its nature very much resembles, and can only be exceeded by the dreadful punishment of the life to come.

On the other hand, the joy and comfort which a truly Christian righteousness affords at the hour of death is inexpressible:—*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.*—When a Christian, in his last moments, can look back with cheerfulness upon a life well spent, and can say with good Hezekiah, *Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight;*—what an unspeakable satisfaction must it needs give him?—If the good Christian (sure) has any fears or apprehensions, they must be altogether

together the effects of natural infirmity, and are in themselves groundless and unreasonable; —he has much more reason to rejoice and be exceeding glad, because great is his reward in heaven:—Death to him is only a gate or passage to a new and better life.—And how cheerfully will he resign the vain and fleeting enjoyments of this world for those more solid and substantial joys which are at God's right hand for evermore! It is there that he has long since fixed his heart; it is there his treasure is:—And what should he repine at, therefore, when called away to take a full possession of it?

In a word, how happy is that soul, and what can possibly disturb his peace and rest, who, in the article of death itself, has the testimony of a good conscience to support him,—the God of heaven to be his friend,—the blessed Angels for his guard,—and the prospect of an everlasting crown of glory, as the blessed reward of his faith and piety?

And now—what is the use we ought to make of this discourse, but only to apply it to the amendment of our lives?

If we have hitherto pursued the ways of sin,—if we have blindly followed any vicious course,—let us begin to open our eyes at last, and

and to see the things which belong unto our peace ;—let us see and consider them in season, and before they be for ever hidden from our eyes.

With what kindness and compassion does our Blessed Saviour, in my text, invite the sinner to repent, and to be happy : *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

How vain a thing it is to seek for any solid rest or satisfaction, in the ways of sin, has been the principal design of this discourse to convince you ; and it is what (I am persuaded) the experience of every wicked man does, one time or other, convince him of. He may range from one unlawful object to another, and from one degree of vice to a greater ; but what does he lay up for himself at last, but bitterness of heart, and terrors of mind, and fearful expectations of Divine vengeance ?

Hence it is that we often see the most profligate of mankind are willing to make religion their last refuge, howsoever they may have despised and neglected it all their life before :—Though they have past their days in the service of sin, yet, when they come to cast up their accounts at last, and see the miserable

ferable fruit of all their service; how gladly would they change their masters? How zealous are they in the last moments of their life to take the yoke of Christ upon them,—to shelter themselves under the wings of religion, and there, if possible, find that rest and comfort to the soul which they vainly sought elsewhere?

But alas! who can tell whether his repentance (though he should offer it) will be then accepted?—If we now refuse to hear the gracious calls and invitations of our Blessed Lord,—have we not just reason to fear, that, in the day of our extremity, he may refuse to hear us?

In a word, it ought to be considered, that religion is the most serious and important thing in the whole world. It is the very end of our being, and therefore ought to be the study and endeavour of our whole lives.—It is, indeed, the only foundation of all true happiness, both in this world and the world to come:—And therefore the most obstinately wicked man, could he but lay aside his prejudices for a while;—could he but for a moment only divest himself of those lusts and passions which hang like a mist before the eyes of men, and fatally mislead their understandings;—he could
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not (I am persuaded) but perceive the infinite necessity and the unspeakable advantage of a religious course of life.

The advantage of it (indeed) the peace, and hope, and satisfaction that attends it, is hardly to be conceived by any, but by those who have felt it;—and happy were it, therefore, if we could all of us be persuaded but to make the trial;—that we would, from this moment, set up a prevailing resolution to obey the Gospel, and to lead the life of Christians.

Then should we find by experience the promise of our Blessed Saviour to be true and certain:—Then should we find rest to our souls here, and, which is infinitely more to be regarded,—eternal rest and happiness hereafter.—

Which God, &c.

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S E R M O N IV.

Jerem. xiii. 23.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.

THESE words of the Prophet describe to us the dangerous estate of those who have been long used and practised in the ways of sin.

Can the Ethiopian (or the Blackmoor) change his skin? Can he alter the natural grain and colour of it, and make it white instead of black? Or can the leopard change and put away those spots which are so deeply printed on his sides? As soon may this be done almost, as for those who have been long accustomed to any vice, and have suffered it to grow into an habit, to change the bent of their heart and life, and to become truly good and religious persons:—Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.

The expression is proverbial, and such as
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were in common use in those times, to denote a thing extremely hard and difficult to be performed; and it is here applied by the Prophet, therefore, to shew the exceeding difficulty of it:—For we are not to understand the passage in so strict a sense as if it implied an utter impossibility, such as never did, nor ever can come to pass. No: This is not of the nature of proverbial sayings, which hold in the general, and for the most part, but usually admit of some exceptions:—And thus it must be in the present case, or it would contradict experience and observation,—there being some examples every-where (though it be certain they are few and rare) of persons who, after a lewd and dissolute course, have been reclaimed at last, and gave sufficient proof of their amendment by the future conduct of their lives.

The expression in my text then, like the other sayings of this kind, must be understood with some allowance and restriction. It is of a nature exactly parallel with that of our Blessed Saviour in the Gospel: *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.*—What can seem to us a greater impossibility than this? But this is the usual style of figu-

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rative and proverbial sayings, perhaps, in all ages and nations—and was so amongst that people to whom our Saviour speaks;—they used to express the great difficulty of a thing by comparing it with something that is impossible.—And the true meaning is expressed by our Lord himself, in other words, more plainly:—*How hardly* (says he) *shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven?* i. e. they will find themselves exposed to more than ordinary difficulties and temptations.—And this was more especially verified at that time, when those who would embrace the Gospel must prepare their minds for persecution:—And then he proceeds to deliver the same thing in the proverbial way:—*It is easier for a camel to go thro' the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* It were easy to produce several other examples of the same kind:—Thus we are told of some who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel; where we see there is an impossibility in the literal sense, but the comparative meaning is very plain, very right, and very instructive—that men are often scrupulous in lesser matters, but make no conscience of committing greater sins. Sayings of this kind are common in most languages and nations.

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It appears, then, that the words of my text, according to the usual nature of a common proverbial saying, were intended to set before us, not the utter impossibility, but only the great difficulty of a change or reformation, after a long habit of vice and wickedness: It shall be therefore my design in the following discourse,

First, To inquire whence arises the great difficulty of changing vicious habits and practices.

2. To shew the possibility of it, however,—and to offer such arguments as may be useful to draw the sinner off from the pursuit of his sins, and lead him to repentance.

First, then, the difficulty of breaking a vicious habit may arise from the nature of habits or customs in general:—It being the nature of all habits whatsoever, the longer time they have been suffered to prevail, to become so much the more confirmed, and so much the harder to subdue.—The frequent and familiar practice of a thing makes it by degrees to become easy to us; and that easiness naturally produces a delight and pleasure in the doing it. And, when men have used it for a while with pleasure, it becomes at length (as it were) natural and necessary to them in the end, and

we find it much more difficult to leave it, than it was at first to take it up.

Common observation and experience will afford us many instances of this kind, even in things which have nothing to support them beside use and custom.—With how much difficulty and pain do men usually overcome the most insignificant habits, such as have no foundation in nature or reason; nothing either of pleasure or profit to recommend them; but were taken up at first they know not how, and were afterwards established by long practice.—Thus a particular gesture, or a peculiar saying and phrase of speech, when once grown customary, are not to be unlearned with ease: Men are apt to use it, even when they do not think of it; nay though perhaps they know it to be sufficiently absurd or unreasonable, and cannot upon second thoughts but condemn themselves for it.—A sad instance of this kind is that of common swearing,—which those who have once gotten an habit of, though they become sensible at length of the folly and impiety of it, and are resolved to leave it; yet what difficulties do they sometimes find, before they can bring that resolution of theirs to good effect?—The bad habit was caught at first, perhaps, with ease, and grew upon them by degrees

grees through their own heedlessness and folly:—But, being once established by familiar practice, it becomes from thenceforth (as it were) a necessary part of their discourse,—and they know not how to speak without it;—and, if ever they are so happy as to recover themselves from it, it is generally by slow degrees, and not without much pains and diligence, care and caution. A man may as soon almost be made to learn a new language, as to unlearn that which he has been long used and accustomed to.

And the same may be said of an habit of intemperance, gaming, and many other vices; to which the temptation at first is small, but, being once grown customary, experience shews what a strange force they sometimes have over the minds of men,—so as that no considerations whatsoever are sufficient to restrain them from the practice of them; no, not though they plainly see before their eyes the ruinous and destructive consequences of them.

Such is the force of custom:—It appears in almost every thing we do:—It makes the most indifferent things to become necessary to us; and those things which at first were perfectly disagreeable by use and custom soon grow tolerable, then easy and agreeable, and gain

upon us by degrees, till, in the end, we know not how to live without them.

But, secondly, habits of vice and wickedness have this advantage of all others, that they fall in with men's corrupt and sinful inclinations; so that they cherish them with greediness, and find the greater difficulty to subdue them.

It is a sad truth, confirmed by daily observation, that men are naturally more inclined to evil than to good:—And though virtue and religion, when duly and seriously attended to, cannot but approve itself to men's sober reason and judgment; yet the bias of their inclinations and affections generally carries them toward vice.—There is a law in our corrupt and sinful natures (as the Apostle observes) that wars against the law of our minds, and makes men prone to chuse what at the same time they cannot but condemn:—And so strong is this propensity to sin, that nothing but the grace of God and the most vigorous resolutions and endeavours will ordinarily support a man against it, or enable him to overcome it.

When therefore vicious inclinations are improved by custom,—and when a long use and familiarity with sin has rendered that which

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was but too prevailing in our natures still more natural to us (as it were) by being habitual:—No wonder that men find the greatest difficulties to subdue and root it out.

It is certain that the path of virtue is a narrow track:—Streight is the gate and narrow is the way (saith our Blessed Lord himself) that leadeth unto life. Whereas the ways of sin are easily pursued:—Men go down the hill with pleasure, and the farther they advance the more unwilling and unable will they be to stop their course, or to retreat:—Their lusts and passions, when they have once given them the rein, hurry them along with violence and precipitation, till they plunge in eternal ruin.

But farther yet:—A custom of sinning naturally tends to destroy the very principles of religion in the hearts of men, and so to harden them against all the arguments that might serve to reclaim them.

When men begin to sin, at first, they commonly do it with some reluctance and unwillingness, whilst they feel their conscience inwardly condemning them, and the grace of God striving with them (as it were) to draw them back and reclaim them.—

But, when they have once overcome the first strugglings of their conscience, and learnt to

despise the just upbraidings of that righteous monitor within them, from thenceforth they become capable of finning with much greater ease and pleasure; and, the more they violate their duty, the less reluctance will they feel in the violation of it, till, in the end, those crimes which would have startled them at first, perhaps, with horror but to think of them, become their frequent and familiar practice, and they make no scruple to commit them, without shame or fear, without sense of remorse, or dread of the divine displeasure.—

Such is the natural tendency of sin to harden the hearts of men.—The more that men indulge it, the less trouble do they find in the commission of it:—It stifles by degrees the voice of reason and the dictates of their conscience, and prevents them from considering what must be the fatal consequence of a vicious course of life.—As the power of sin prevails and grows up in the heart of man, the impressions of religion naturally wear away,—nor does it only tend to destroy the force of religion in the minds of men, but sometimes even to root out the belief of it, and betray them into downright infidelity.—

For though nothing can be more unreasonable than to throw off the first principles of religion,

religion, the belief of a God, a Providence, and a future Judgment, and another state of life; yet this is no uncommon thing with those whose reason is depraved by sin, and their understandings darkened by a long course of vice and wickedness.

Men are generally inclined to believe as their wishes lead, and as their interests direct them:—And hence it comes to pass, that it is the easiest thing in the world for a man to deceive himself;—for, as he wishes or desires, so he thinks*;—and, when a man's ways, therefore, are become abominable and corrupt, it is but natural for him to say in his heart, *There is no God*. His guilt, indeed, makes it highly expedient for him that there should be none: And hence he endeavours to persuade himself that there really is none.—And, when a man is willing to be thus persuaded, every little shew of argument, or none at all, will satisfy him:—He is forward to believe what he wishes to be true, though in itself never so absurd or unreasonable.

* It is a saying of Demosthenes, Olynth. 3. That it is the easiest thing in the world to deceive one's self; for, as a man wishes or desires, so he thinks—*Διόνειε παῖσιν ἀπαιδίστοισι αὐτοῖς ἱκαναῖσιν, ὃ γὰρ βούλεται τὸ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ αἰσθεῖται.*—

In short, a vicious life does set a fatal bias on the understanding, and very often tempts men to throw off the belief of all religion, that they may no longer be held under the restraints of any, but may be able to pursue their sins with greater freedom, and with less anxiety.

And, when the restraints of religion are thus thrown off, what is there left to check men in their evil courses? Sad almost and desperate is the condition of those persons who have been so long accustomed to the ways of sin, as to fall at last into a state of infidelity;—as soon almost may *the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots*, as these, without a miracle of grace, be converted from doing evil.

Last of all, the difficulty of changing vicious habits may arise from that judicial blindness, or hardness of heart, which is sometimes permitted by Almighty God to fall upon the obstinate and presumptuous sinner,—when he withdraws from him the influence of his grace or Holy Spirit, and gives him up to the conduct of his own vicious inclinations.

It is true that God is seldom known to leave the sinner to himself, as long as there is
any

any hope almost, or possibility of his amendment;—but, after many, many provocations, who can blame him, if he fail at length to continue the assistance of that grace, which men have so often and so grievously abused?

This is what he sometimes threatens in the Scriptures,—and this, indeed, is the true meaning of all those texts and phrases, where God is any-where said to harden the hearts of men;—it is only by withdrawing of his grace and Holy Spirit from them, after they have wilfully and heinously offended him; and, by the withdrawing whereof being left to themselves, they still go on more and more to fill up the measure of their sins.

When, therefore, by long use and practice, men arrive to such an height of wickedness as to have sinned away even the grace of God, what is there left that can reclaim them from their vicious courses? It is true, this grace or assistance of Almighty God, even when forfeited and lost, may be recovered;—God is ready to bestow it even upon the worst of sinners, if they return and seek it with an hearty and sincere repentance;—and no man can be reduced to such a condition here in this life, as that he ought absolutely to despair of grace or mercy:—But, however, when we
consider

consider how few of those once hardened sinners do ever return to a better mind, or take the pains to qualify themselves to be fit objects of the grace or mercy of Almighty God, we shall soon be convinced of the exceeding difficulty that attends the change or conversion of such as these;—and, though with God all things are possible, yet, considering things according to human appearance or probability, there is hardly any thing more unlikely than the reclaiming an inveterate sinner from the error of his ways,—and that they should be taught to do good, who have been long accustomed to do evil.

Thus I have gone through the first general head of this discourse,—and have shewn you whence arises the great difficulty that attends the conversion of a sinner, after a long course of vice and wickedness. I should now proceed to the second thing proposed,—which was to shew the possibility of it—however;—but I shall at present only draw a few practical inferences from what has been said.

First, then,—from what has been said of the difficulty of changing a vicious course of life, we cannot but perceive the great advantage of a virtuous and religious education.

And,

And, indeed, whoever considers how hard a thing it is to change a wicked course of life, will soon be convinced of the great importance and advantage of being trained up in season to a good one.—The more difficult it is to recover from the ways of sin, the more care should certainly be taken to prevent (if possible) our falling into it;—and this can no way be done but by the means of a truly Christian and religious education,—by instilling into the minds of children, in their tender years, those seeds of virtue and religion which may be a means to guard them against all temptations, and to preserve them from the infection of vice and wickedness, with which the world so much abounds.

Again, 2dly, if the difficulty of changing vicious habits be so very great, hence we should learn in season to prevent the growth of sin, and by no means to suffer any vicious practice whatsoever to grow up into an habit or custom.—

There is nothing in nature so incroaching as sin;—if you indulge it never so little, and suffer it to prevail over you but for once or twice, it will soon enlarge its power till it gain a perfect mastery over your inclinations and your resolutions, and reduce you to the
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condition of a slave. When a person is once entered in a wicked course, it is impossible for him to say where he will stop;—for one sin draws another after it,—and, the farther he proceeds, the more unwilling and the more unable will he be to change his course, or to retreat.—

In short, every repeated act of sin is a new advance towards the habit or custom of it—and, when a sin becomes customary, we have seen, from the foregoing discourse, how hard and difficult it will be to subdue it.—If, therefore, you desire to shun the danger of customary and habitual sinning, you must avoid, as much as may be, every single act of sin;—you should be sure to check the growth of vice in its beginning, lest it grow into an habit, and endanger your salvation.

Again, 3dly, if you have already contracted any vicious custom, you ought with all your might to set yourselves against it, and endeavour to destroy and root it out:—Always remembering, that, the sooner this is done, the less of difficulty shall you find in doing it;—whereas, if ye suffer yourselves to continue long in any wicked course, it may become at length, perhaps, extremely hard and difficult to recover out of it.

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Sad, indeed, and most deplorable is the condition of those persons, whose sins have reigned so long upon them, as to grow into inveterate habits:—Sad and hopeless, almost, is the case of those who have been long accustomed to do evil. But, however, the condition of such as these is not so altogether desperate, but that there is still a possibility of their being reclaimed;—and it is the whole design of this discourse to lead them to it,—that, shewing them the great difficulty and danger of their case, we may (if possible) awaken in them the more earnest resolutions and endeavours of amendment,—not forgetting earnestly to implore the grace of God to succour and assist them.

For, 4thly, (and it is the last use or inference I shall draw from the subject before us) if the difficulty of changing vicious customs be so very great,—hence we may perceive the great necessity we are under of the Divine grace and assistance, to enable us to correct the error of our ways; and, consequently, how diligent we ought to be in the use of those means of grace which God hath appointed to convey it to us.

As our Saviour tells us, in a like case with this before us, though with men it may seem im-

impossible to turn themselves from an old inveterate course and habit of sin, yet, with God, and by the help of his Divine grace, all things are possible. This, therefore, (I mean the grace and assistance of Almighty God) is to be earnestly desired and sought, in all the several ways which He Himself hath appointed and prescribed;—by devout and diligent prayer;—by reading the Holy Scriptures, or by hearing them read, and other good books that are apt to form the mind to piety and virtue;—by keeping the church duly, and that not merely as a thing of course, but with a serious and hearty desire of being there edified and instructed in the will of God;—and, lastly, for those who have once begun a Christian course, and can satisfy themselves of the sincerity of their repentance, a devout and frequent partaking of the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper.—

These are the several means or instruments of grace to which God directs us in the Gospel:—And let no one be so vain as to imagine that he shall be able to perform his duty, much less to recover himself from the captivity of sin and the slavery of vicious customs, while he neglects the only proper means

means which infinite wisdom has prescribed for this very end and purpose.—

The use of those means, indeed, is what God hath expressly made a part of our duty, and, as such, is incumbent upon, and ought to be the care of every Christian;—but it is more especially necessary for those whose affections, being enslaved to sin, have need of the most powerful helps and remedies to withdraw them from the love and practice of it:—And here is the great unhappiness of their case, that, the more deeply men are engaged in the ways of sin and wickedness, the greater aversion do they generally find in themselves to prayer and other religious duties,—it being a common artifice and delusion of the Devil, when he has once drawn men into a wicked course, to keep them there, by preventing them from using the proper means of their recovery.—

But, assure yourselves, there is not a more certain sign of a person's being in the broad way to destruction, than when to the habit or custom of any vice he adds a contempt of religion and the neglect of God and his worship, whether public or private.

He that throws off his dependence upon God must, of necessity, fall under the power
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of that wicked one, who, as a roaring lion, is ever watchful for his prey, and seeking whom he may devour.—

That you may not fall into his snares, therefore, and be led captive by him at his will, remember how much it concerns you to apply daily to the Throne of Grace to help in time of need;—to put yourselves under the protection of that God that made you; of that Saviour who redeemed you, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, and who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for us.—

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty band of God, that he may lift you up.—Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.—Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.—Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

To Father, &c.

SECOND

S E C O N D P A R T.

THE Second thing proposed is to shew that, though it be, indeed, a difficult thing to change an old inveterate habit or custom of sin, yet that there is still a possibility of it,—and that it behoves men, therefore, earnestly to endeavour it.—

I have already observed, in the beginning of this discourse, that the words of my text are not to be understood in so severe a sense, as if it implied an utter impossibility to change a vicious course of life:—No, this would contradict experience and observation:—For there have been always some examples in the world (though it may be they are few and rare) of persons, who, after a very lewd and dissolute course, have been reclaimed at last, and gave sufficient proof of their amendment by the future conduct of their lives. This, therefore, is enough to shew us the possibility of the thing.

Moreover, as our Blessed Saviour died upon the cross for the sins of the world, there is no man excluded from the benefit of repentance, unless he wilfully exclude himself.—And God is ever ready to bestow the assistance of his grace, if *so be* men will but earnestly desire

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and seek it, and make a right use of it when obtained : So that, as our Saviour said in a like case, though with men it may seem impossible, and though it be, indeed, a thing exceeding difficult to change a wicked course of life long followed and pursued ; yet, with God, and by the help of his Divine grace, all things are possible.—

But then it is to be remembered, that this requires the concurrence of men themselves, and the utmost stretch of their resolutions and endeavours to free themselves from the captivity of sin :—For the grace of God always acts in such a manner as is suitable to the freedom of our natures and the frame and constitution of our minds :—*He draws us to Him* (as the Prophet Hosea expresses it) *with the cords of a man* ; that is,—not by violent and forcible measures, such as cannot be resisted ; but by gentle and persuasive methods, such as are fittest to be offered to creatures endued with reason and understanding ; that so we may comply with the grace and will of God, in working out our own salvation.

Could we then but once persuade a wicked man, though never so long practised in the ways of sin, to set up a sincere and vigorous resolution, with a suitable degree of watchfulness,

ness, and zeal, and diligence; would he but earnestly implore the grace of God to assist his own sincere endeavours, and to put him forward in the reformation of his heart and life; this would undoubtedly be sufficient to enable him to overcome the difficulties of a true repentance, though they be never so great or many:—For though, humanly speaking, (as our Blessed Lord observes in a like case) though with men this may seem impossible,—and though it be indeed a thing exceeding difficult;—yet with God, and by the help of his Divine grace and Holy Spirit, all things are possible.

What remains, then, but for those who are concerned in this discourse, that they would set about this great and necessary work without delay?—

First, then, consider the necessity of forsaking every vicious habit and practice, as you ever hope for mercy and salvation in the life to come:—For, should you still continue in your sins, and should you go out of the world, with all those evil habits and dispositions still cleaving to your soul, what could you expect hereafter but to have your portion with those reprobate and wicked spirits who shall be condemned to everlasting torments? It is impos-

fible, in the nature of the thing, that a wicked and impure soul can ever be happy in the world to come:—And therefore it is a thing of absolute necessity to renounce all evil habits, if ever we desire our own happiness; nay, if we would not fall into the greatest misery. And what is thus absolutely necessary, no difficulty (methinks) should discourage us from undertaking. How much better is it to undergo some pain and trouble to subdue your sins in this life, than suffer your souls to perish everlastingly?—

Again, secondly, consider the danger of delaying this important task, and putting off from day to day your resolutions of amendment.—

For, if it be difficult to change a wicked course to-day, believe it, it will be much more difficult to-morrow,—and the next day will but add to the difficulty, as it shortens the time we have to do it in.—The longer that you go on in a course of sin, the more will your affections be enslaved to it; the faster hold will it take of your hearts, and consequently the harder will it be to root it out.—Beside that, the more you multiply your sins, the greater sorrow do you lay up for yourselves hereafter,

hereafter, and the more bitter must that repentance be that is required to the pardon of them.

And then, which is an higher consideration than all this,—consider that, all the time you thus delay this necessary change and reformation, you run the greatest hazard in the world : —For what do you else but risk your own salvation, and put it in the power of every chance or accident that may deprive you of your life, at the same time, to destroy your soul ?—A man, as long as he pursues his sins, is in a state of enmity with God : And how justly may he fear, lest that all-righteous and omnipotent Being should in his anger cut him off, whilst he goes on daily and wilfully to abuse him ! —It is a most uncomfortable state (sure) did we but consider it aright, to have sinned away our title to the Divine protection ; and yet, should God withdraw his protecting hand but for a moment only, we are gone : So that whoever puts off his repentance and conversion, runs the greatest hazard in the world of being surpris'd and overtaken in a wicked course, and consequently of being for ever miserable.—

And what a dreadful hazard (methinks) is this?—Who is there that seriously considers

what it is to be for ever miserable, and does not tremble at the very thoughts of it?—

And yet this shall certainly be the lot of every wicked and impenitent person.—As sure as God is just, and the iniquities of men provoking; so sure is it, that there is an hell prepared for the ungodly, where they must feel the just reward of their impieties for ever.

And now, when we compare the short-lived pleasures of a sinful course, if there be any real pleasure in it, with the inexpressible torments of the life to come, one cannot but admire and stand amazed at the prodigious folly of mankind, who chuse to gratify their sinful lusts and passions, though they run the certain hazard of their souls.—Alas! could we but for a single moment only cast our eyes into those regions of eternal sorrow, where wicked men endure the punishment of their past lives:—What an abhorrence would it give us of the ways of sin?—And what infinite reason should we see to bless Almighty God for his exceeding grace and mercy towards us, that we are still left among the living, and enjoy the means and opportunities of repentance.—

I would by all this (if it were possible) awaken the souls of those amongst us who have hitherto pursued a wicked course of life,—
such

such as my text describes and sets out to us, who have been long accustomed to do evil:— I would (if possible) I say, awaken and rouse them, by what has been said, to consider seriously of their condition, and to resolve at length, in good earnest, to set about the reformation of their lives,—which, though it be a task of difficulty and labour, yet (we bless God) there is still a possibility of it, if we could but persuade men to apply themselves seriously and diligently about it.—

Of all the parts of our ministerial office, it is melancholy to reflect, that there is none more necessary, and yet none more hopeless, (generally speaking) than that wherein we apply ourselves to the long practised and inveterate sinner, and endeavour to reclaim him from the error of his way.—How rarely is it that our exhortations and instructions to this purpose are seen to meet with the desired success? And yet, when we consider the infinite value of an immortal soul, who is there (methinks) that would not use his utmost endeavours, if he may by any means save some from everlasting misery and ruin.—

To this purpose all that we can do is to shew men the danger of a wicked life, with all that plainness and sincerity which becomes

the ministers of Christ :—To exhort, persuade, and intreat ;—to draw forth the artillery of Heaven, and to set before their eyes the terrors of the Lord.—If this should fail to move sinners to repentance,—we can only leave them to the grace and mercy of Almighty God,—most earnestly beseeching Him, who is a God of compassion, long-suffering, and of great goodness, that he would open the eyes and hearts of men to see the things that belong unto their peace, before they be for ever hidden from their eyes.—

To God, &c.

S E R-

S E R M O N V.

Luke xv. 10.

Likewise I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

OUR Blessed Saviour came into the world on purpose to call sinners to repentance. He therefore sets before them a variety of arguments to engage them to repent: And, amongst these, there is none which demands our most serious consideration, or is more instructive and affecting, than that which is contained in the words of my text,—that *there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

It shall therefore be my design, in the following discourse,

First of all, briefly to explain the passage before us; and, then,

To make some proper uses and improvement of it.

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There need not many words to explain the meaning of my text.—By the *sinner that repenteth*, we are to understand a wicked man that turneth from the evil of his way: For we see that he is here opposed to the just person, or to the ninety and nine such who needed no repentance.

Not but that good men too have need to exercise repentance in a certain sense; that is, they must be truly sorry for their sins, and daily endeavour to grow better: For this will be the duty even of the best of Christians as long as he continues liable to sin; which, in some degree or other, he will always be in this imperfect state. But then the repentance of a wicked man is much more than this, and, beside a sorrow for his sins, implies a thorough change or reformation of his heart and life.

The good Christian is one who has already taken upon him in good earnest to walk in all the ways of God's commandments: His heart is truly bent upon the performance of his duty, and his endeavours are sincere.—He never allows himself in the practice of any gross or wilful sins, such as may put him out of favour with Almighty God, and destroy his title to salvation:—And he daily prays to God to
assist

assist him with his grace, that he may still become more and more perfect: So that, his heart being thus set right, and the general course or tenor of his life being such as God requires, and will accept of, he has no need of that repentance which is necessary for the wicked man to restore him to God's favour,— I mean an intire change of his heart and affections, as well as of his life and actions; without which he must never hope to be admitted into the number of the just or righteous. In short, a good Christian may become *a better* man; but a bad Christian, or one who is guilty of any vice or wickedness, must become quite *another* man before his repentance can be real, or accepted in the sight of God.—The lewd, the drunkard, or debauched person, must become sober, chaste, and continent: The knave must become honest; the malicious and revengeful person must cleanse his heart from all these black and odious passions, and learn to have a sincere love for God and man. In a word, they *must put off, concerning their former conversation, the old man, (as the Apostle speaks) and be renewed in the spirit of their minds, and, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; Looking for that*
blessed

bleſſed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, when he ſhall come to judge the world in righteouſneſs, and to reward every man according to his deeds.

—This is that great change which is ſo often deſcribed in Holy Scriptures by the phraſes of a new heart and a new ſpirit; by putting on the new man, the new creature, and the like: —Expreſſions plainly intimating how great that change muſt be which can reſtore the loſt ſinner to a ſenſe of God and of his duty; that can raiſe him up from death to life (as it were;) from ſlavery to freedom, from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

This change is not to be effected without his own moſt ſerious reſolutions and endeavours, and the grace of God aſſiſting him; which he muſt therefore learn to pray for in the moſt devout and fervent manner. His ſorrow for his ſins muſt be real and ſincere: He muſt both abhor and renounce his former evil courſes: His inward temper muſt be altered; his heart and affections muſt be changed from what they were; he muſt hate what he formerly loved, all vice and wickedneſs; and he muſt love what he formerly hated, or neglected,
God

God and goodness. From a slave of sin he must become the servant of Christ, and set himself without reserve to obey the will of God in all things: For nothing less than this can shew his repentance to be real, or intitle him to the Divine mercy and favour. And this surely is a work of difficulty: And it is the greatness of this change (no doubt) that creates *joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

There is joy (says our Saviour) *in the presence of the Angels of God;*—that is, not only God himself is highly pleased with the conversion of a sinner, but the holy Angels which attend his throne, happy as they are, and high in dignity in heaven, yet feel a sensible delight and pleasure, when any of their fellow-creatures here below, who had gone astray from the ways of righteousness, are, by a timely and sincere repentance, restored to the favour of Almighty God and the hopes of salvation.—The plain meaning of my text then, you see, is this, that God is highly pleased, and his holy Angels rejoice, when the wicked man turneth from the evil of his way, and doth that which is lawful and right, so as to save his soul alive: *I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*—

Having

Having thus briefly explained the words of my text, I come now, as I proposed, in the

Second place, to make some uses and improvement of the subject before us. And, first, we may observe the great goodness of Almighty God in admitting sinners to repentance, that he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, as He himself declares; but would have all men turn from their transgressions, do their duty, and be saved.—

If God be highly pleased with the repentance of a sinner, we may be sure that He affords them all the necessary helps and means for their repentance; and therefore, if men still continue in the ways of sin, the fault must be intirely in themselves; something in their own perverse wills and affections that obstructs all the methods of Divine grace to reclaim them.—God sent his Son, our Saviour Christ, into the world, on purpose to call sinners to repentance; that great Shepherd of the sheep, who (like the man in the parable) came to seek and to save that which was lost;—and his Holy Spirit is ever ready to assist and forward the great work of their conversion.—He calls upon men by the constant preaching of his ministers, by the frequent warnings of his Providence, by the voice of reason, and the voice

voice of conscience ; by all the good things He bestows upon them, and all the evils and afflictions which He sends them ; by the one (if possible) to invite and allure ; and, by the other, to chastise and bring them back into the paths of duty and obedience.—If men are still deaf to all the calls of Heaven, and refuse to turn and to repent, their obstinacy is without excuse ;—and the abuse of so much mercy must needs increase their guilt, and aggravate their condemnation at the last day.—And, therefore, from hence we cannot but perceive the folly of that common practice of wicked men, who take occasion from the mercy of God to put off their repentance from time to time, and to harden themselves the rather in their wickedness :—Whereas this, of all things in the world, ought to lead them to repentance.—*Thinkest thou this, O man, (says the Apostle) that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*—Rom. ii. 4.

As this is the design of God Almighty's patience and long-suffering, so, the more that hath been his patience, the greater is the guilt of those who thus despise it,—and who, by thus

abusing the mercy of God, do only treasure up unto themselves more *wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* Rom., ii. 5.

For, secondly, we may consider that the joy, which is said to be in heaven over a sinner that repenteth, plainly shews us the great danger of a state of sin and impenitence.

For what is the reason of this joy but only that an immortal soul is hereby saved, which, without repentance, must have perished everlastingly?—

The worth and value of our souls is best known to God who created and redeemed them;—who stamped them at first with the image of his own eternity, (as the Book of Wisdom speaks;) and, when corrupted and depraved with sin, sent his own ever-blessed Son into the world, to lead a wretched life, and die an ignominious death; and all that he might save our souls from death and misery.

And, as this shews us the infinite value of an immortal soul, so it ought to alarm us with the apprehensions of our danger, if we still remain impenitent.—If our souls are designed to live for ever, in a world to come, either in a state of happiness or misery;—if this must depend on our behaviour here in
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this life ;—if this be the only day of trial, by which our everlasting state shall be determined ;—and, if this day of trial, moreover, be very short, and very uncertain as to its continuance :—How great is the hazard that man runs who ventures but for a day to continue in a state of wilful disobedience and rebellion against God ? *What is a man profited, (says our Saviour) if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?* What are all the pleasures and profits of the world, which so strongly tempt and draw men into sin, when compared with that remorse, and anguish, and despair, which shall pursue condemned wretches in the other world ; or else put in the balance with that exceeding weight of glory, those joys and pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore ?

Can you, therefore, still resolve to pursue your sins ? (I speak to all those who are engaged in any wicked course whatever.) Will you still pursue your sins, when you every moment run the hazard of falling headlong into destruction ? Or, if repentance be the only way to escape so great a danger, can we think it strange that *there is joy in the presence*

of the Angels of God over one sinner that repented?

But, 3dly, we may observe from my text that there is a sort of fellowship or communion betwixt the whole rational or spiritual creation; betwixt Angels and men, the visible and the invisible world.

For, when it is said that *there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God*, we need not doubt but the holy Angels are partakers of this joy, and, from their love to mankind, feel a sensible delight and pleasure at the conversion of a sinner.

How far they may be instrumental in promoting this conversion is what we cannot say;—but only this we know in general, that, as the evil Angels are always busy to tempt and draw men into sin, so the good Angels are appointed by Almighty God to defend and to protect us from their snares, and to bring about the great designs of his Providence:—*Are they not all ministering spirits* (says the Apostle) *sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?* Heb. i. 14.

Our duty, in return, is to be thankful to Almighty God for this wonderful instance of his goodness;—not to pray to, or worship, the holy Angels themselves, which is expressly
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forbidden us in Scripture, Col. ii. 18.—But, however, to take them for our pattern and example, in their love to God and men;—and to imitate those blessed inhabitants of heaven, to whom we shall be joined hereafter in the same society, when we shall be made equal to the Angels, and can die no more, being the children of God, and children of the resurrection.

This is what we are taught to pray for by our Blessed Lord Himself, in that most perfect prayer of his, that we may be enabled to do the will of God *on earth as it is done in heaven*,—i. e. with the same readiness and alacrity, the same diligence and pleasure, with which the blessed Angels of God perform the will of their Creator:—They, who are admitted to stand before the presence of God, and to have a clear view (as it were) of his wonderful goodness, cannot but feel their hearts inflamed with love towards him,—and this engages them in the highest raptures of praise and adoration; and what they thus admire and adore they are naturally led to imitate, as far as they are able.—Thus to love, adore, and imitate the Divine goodness, is the religion (if I may call it so) of Angels, and is the pattern we must follow here below, if we desire

to do the will of God *on earth as it is done in heaven.*—

And, as another improvement of the subject before us;—if the holy Angels rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, this also should be matter of joy to us, and we should use our best endeavours to promote it, as we have opportunity and ability;—for can we be employed in a better or a nobler work than this, which brings so much glory to God and good to men, and creates joy in the presence of the Angels of God?—

Such is the power which one man hath over another by familiar acquaintance and conversation, that we easily become a sort of good or bad Angels to each other;—good Angels, if we study to promote the interests of virtue and religion in the world;—but Devils, if, by our example or persuasions, we draw others into sin:—And as the one will certainly make us partakers in the sins of others, and increase our future punishments; so the other does, in a manner, intitle us to a share in all the good that shall be done by those whom we have, at any time, reclaimed from vice to virtue. As this, therefore, is the greatest act of charity that can be; so there are the highest promises made to it in
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Holy Scripture,—that *He, who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul alive, and shall hide a multitude of sins,* James v. 20.—and that *they, who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars, for ever and ever.*—

5. And last of all, therefore, let the joy, which is said to be *in heaven over a sinner that repenteth*, put us in mind of the far greater joy which shall be at the last day, when all the truly good and penitent souls that ever lived shall be admitted to their final state of happiness, and Angels and Saints shall rejoice together from thenceforth to all eternity.

The part, which the blessed Angels are to bear in the transactions of the day of Judgment, is described to us in the Holy Scripture with equal plainness and solemnity ;—they are to attend upon the Son of man, when he appears in glory ;—they are to gather together the elect from the four quarters of the heavens ;—they are to be witnesses of that awful sentence which shall then be passed upon all mankind, and to receive the just, as their fellow-citizens, into their everlasting mansions in the kingdom of heaven :—Then is it that their joy, as well as ours, shall be complete, when they shall see all those good and penitent souls, over whom they

had rejoiced before, now placed above the reach of danger or temptation,—and fixed in such a happy, such a perfect state, where they shall need no more repentance, because they shall sin no more for ever.

When the world was made at first, and put into that beauteous order in which we now see it, we are told by God himself, in the Book of Job, that the *morning-stars sung together, and all the sons of God*, that is, the blessed Angels, *shouted for joy*, Job. xxxviii. 7. —And, when the world shall be again dissolved, and a new and better state of things succeed, the joy and triumph will be still increased,—Angels and Saints uniting in one general concert of everlasting praises and thanksgivings to the King of Heaven, saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

What remains, then, but only, in the last place, and by way of application, earnestly to exhort all those who are engaged in any sinful course whatever, and who are in the number of those lost sheep whom our Saviour Christ, in great mercy, came to seek and to save, that they would resolve immediately to forsake
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their sins; that they would turn to God with all their hearts, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

It is true, repentance is a difficult and tedious task; and the more so, the longer time men have pursued their sins.—It will require much pains and labour to subdue inveterate habits, and to put off the whole body of sin (as the Scriptures speak) *i. e.* all your sinful passions and affections;—but what is this, when you consider the absolute necessity of it, that there is no being safe or happy without it?—Consider how much better is it, by your repentance, to bring joy to the Angels of God, than, by your hardness and impenitence, to gratify the malice of those evil Spirits who continually watch for your destruction?

Whatever course you take, either heaven or hell must be the gainer by it.—If you seriously repent of all your sins; if you break off every evil habit, and, with a sincere and hearty resolution, enter upon a new and better course of life, and from henceforth walk in all the ways of God's commandments; Almighty God is ready to receive you to his mercy; the holy Angels will rejoice at your conversion;—all good men will commend

and applaud you ;—your own conscience will approve it ;—you will feel the comfort and the pleasure of it here in this life, and will reap the inexpressible reward of it in the life to come.

On the other hand, if you still go on in the ways of sin ; if the love of vice and wickedness hath so hardened your hearts, that you cannot, will not, bring yourselves to any serious resolutions of forsaking it : Consider, that Almighty God must needs look down upon you with abhorrence ; the great adversary of mankind, who, like a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour, will be ever watching to seize you as his prey ; —all good men must disapprove and condemn you ;—your own conscience will be every now and then alarming you with the fears and horrors of a guilty mind ;—you will feel but little peace or comfort here in this world ; —and what must follow in the world to come,—but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, despair and misery for ever ?—

Ob ! that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end ! That they would consider it in season, while the day of grace still shines upon them ; for, behold ! the night cometh, wherein no man
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*can work:—*That they would be persuaded seriously to lay to heart the folly and danger of a sinful course, and to see and know, in this their day, the things that belong unto their peace, before they be for ever hidden from their eyes.

I conclude all with a sentence or two of Holy Scripture, which may deserve your serious consideration.

Turn unto the Lord with all your heart, and put not off from day to day.

Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you; cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.

Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.—

To God, &c.

S E R-

S E R M O N VI.

Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

THIS was the answer of our Blessed Saviour to a question that was put Him by a certain man amongst the Jews, who was a Pharisee (it seems) and a student or professor of their Law.

Our Blessed Lord, but just before, (as we learn from the foregoing part of this chapter) had put the Sadducees to silence by proving to them, from the Books of Moses, the resurrection of the dead :—For the Sadducees, though they believed the Writings of Moses, yet they denied the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, and, in short, every thing of a life to come.

Our Saviour, therefore, to convince them of their error and impiety, out of those very Scrip-

Scriptures which they themselves acknowledged and believed, produces that text where God is said to speak to Moses after this manner : *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ;—and then tells them, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*

The plain drift and force of which argument is this :—That Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, were all of them dead and buried, long before the time of Moses ;—and yet God, when He spake to Moses in the bush, declares Himself, even at that time, to be their God : *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*—Now, if Abraham or the rest at that time had been utterly extinct ;—had there been nothing remaining of them then, but what was dead and rotten in the grave ;—how could God be said, at that time, to be their God ? For to be a God to them must certainly imply some blessing or another, some felicity which they enjoyed by having Him for their God ; and, consequently, they must still be living to enjoy it. *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living :—*How can He be the God of those who have no life or being, no sense or perception, who can neither own Him for
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their God, nor receive any benefit or kindness from Him? And, therefore, when He declares Himself to be *the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*, it follows, that, though these holy men were dead, though their bodies were corrupted and consumed in the grave, yet their souls must have a being and existence somewhere;—they must be still alive and happy, or they could never be said to have the Lord for their God.

This argument was, indeed, so very strong and convincing, that the Sadducees could have nothing to reply to it; and, it is said, the multitude of those that were about Him, when they heard this, were astonished at his doctrine.

When the Pharisees heard that He had thus put the Sadducees to silence, they also were gathered together:

And, to try their skill upon Him, one of them, who was a Lawyer, puts the following question to Him:

Master, which is the great Commandment in the Law?

And to this our Blessed Lord replies, with the same infallible wisdom with which He answered all the other questions that were put Him (as you have it in my text)

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Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

But, that they might not think that this first and great commandment was the only one they were concerned to observe, or that the love of God with all the heart could excuse them from loving their neighbour,—our Saviour immediately adds, *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets;—i. e. whatsoever the Law or the Prophets do injoin, as a matter of duty either to God or man, is briefly comprehended and contained in these two precepts.—

So that we see the whole of our duty is, by our Blessed Lord Himself, reduced within the compass of these two plain rules or injunctions,—viz. *to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.*

Of these the first and great commandment is the love of God,—and it is this which I propose to consider in the following discourse.

And, 1st, I shall inquire into the nature of this duty, and shew wherein it consists.

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2. I shall consider the degrees and measures of it here enjoined.

3. I shall shew what are the proper fruits and effects of it, and the influence it will have upon our practice.—

4. I shall offer some motives and considerations proper to engage us to the love of God,—and close up all with a brief application.

And, 1st, then, for the nature of the duty,—it is to be observed, that our love of any thing or person must vary, according to the difference of the object on which it is placed. Thus, the love of a friend is one thing ; that of a father is another ; of a good Prince or Ruler, or of any great and noble character, is another. But, in general, that which engages our love to any person is something which we conceive to be good and excellent in the object itself, or something relative to us and which conduces to our happiness. And, upon both these accounts, God is the proper object of our love, and intitled to the highest measures and degrees of it :—He is the most excellent Being in Himself :—He is our greatest friend and benefactor,—and, moreover, the source and fountain of our happiness,—both with respect to this life and the life to come ;—upon which

which accounts, therefore, He may justly demand from us, in the

1st place, A love of honour and esteem.

2. A love of gratitude.—And,

3. A love of complacency or delight.

These are the three parts or branches of which the love of God consists.—

The first branch of that love we owe to God is a love of honour and esteem; And this is founded in the Divine excellencies and perfections, it being natural for us to admire and esteem that which is most excellent and perfect. As God, therefore, is the most perfect of all beings; as he is infinitely wise, and just, and good, and has all other excellencies in Himself, and is the source or fountain of all excellency in the creatures; hence it is that He may justly demand of us a love of honour, esteem, and admiration.—

A second branch of that love we owe to God is a love of gratitude,—and the ground or reason of this affection is the many benefits and mercies we receive from Him.

It is natural to love our friends and those that do us good:—We feel our hearts incline towards them with a tenderness of gratitude and affection which cannot be so well expressed,

ed, as it is known by sense and experience.—And such a love we ought to have for God, who is the best of friends, the greatest benefactor to us.—It is to engage us to this love of Him that he is so often represented to us, in Holy Scripture, under the endearing characters of our Maker and Preserver, our Father and Redeemer, and, in a word, as the Author and Giver of all good :—That from hence we might be taught to pay Him those affectionate regards which become justly due to so much goodness.

3. There is another sort of love which becomes due to God, when we consider Him not as the author of our happiness, but as the object of it, or as He himself is our chief happiness and felicity.—And this naturally produces a love of desire, of complacency or delight in Him ; a temper of mind well known to the Royal Psalmist ; for he lays it down as a matter of duty, and such as carries a reward along with it, Pf. xxxvii. 4. *Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

To convince us that this must needs go to make up one branch of that love we owe to God, we need only to consider, that God is to be the great object of our happiness in the life

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to come.—Our chief felicity shall consist in the enjoyment of his presence, in the knowledge and contemplation of his wonderful excellencies, in seeing, and loving, and praising, and adoring Him for ever. And, as God shall be the object of our joy and happiness there, so He must be the object of our affection and desire here.—We must delight to approach Him in the ways of piety and devotion; to draw as near to Him as we can in this life, by often considering and imitating his Divine perfections; to set our affections on the things above; and to wait with hope and pleasure for that appointed time when we shall see and enjoy him for ever.—It was this Divine love that made St. Paul even long to be dissolved, and to be with Christ:—And it was this likewise that made the Royal Psalmist cry out in that passionate strain,—*Like as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God.*

My soul is a-thirst for God, even for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God?

And thus much may suffice briefly to shew the nature of this duty of the love of God, and wherein it consists:—It consists in paying Him that esteem and veneration which is due to his

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transcendent excellencies,—that gratitude and affection which belongs to Him as the Author of our being and Giver of all good :—And, last of all, that delight and complacency which is due to Him as the object of our happiness, our chief felicity both in this life and the next.

The second thing to be considered is the degrees and measures of the duty here required :—And these are,

That we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and (as the other Evangelists add) with all our strength.

Where, not to enlarge particularly upon the different phrases and expressions here used,—the full extent and meaning of them may be comprized under the two following heads :—

1st, That we love God above all things. And,

2dly, That we entertain no other affection that may be opposite or contrary to the love of God.

First, To love the Lord our God with all our heart is to love Him above all things else. —Not that it excludes every other thing from having a share in our affection, but only teaches us to love them in a less degree, and with a due subordination to the love of God :—To
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let this be the supreme affection of our souls, and to let nothing else out-rival Him, or be suffered to come in competition with Him. And this may easily be seen in time of trial;—if we suffer no affection whatsoever to prevail so far upon us as to draw us from our duty; if we are ready, when occasion offers, to renounce every thing, even those things which are dearest to us, rather than commit a sin, and forfeit the Divine favour.—This is the best and surest proof that can be given of our loving God above all things.

Again, to love the Lord our God with all our heart is to love Him with an intire affection, and so as to exclude all others whatsoever that may be opposite and contrary to the love of God.—

For God will by no means accept of a partial love, and such as men are willing to divide betwixt Him and their own lusts; and any one inordinate affection, indulged and entertained, will leave no place or room for the love of God.—It was an exprefs declaration of St. John,—*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; i. e. if he love this present evil world,* (as another Apostle calls it, Gal. i. 4.) if he complies with the bad customs of the world, and his heart is taken up

with the pursuits of covetousness, of ambition, or sensuality, it is certain he can have no true love for God.—And the same may be said with regard to every other sinful and irregular affection:—They must be altogether banished from our hearts, if we desire to love the Lord our God (as we are commanded in my text) with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind.

But, because the love of God, as well as every other grace and virtue, is best of all known by its fruits, let us proceed, as we proposed, in the third place, to shew what are the proper fruits and effects of this love of God, and the influence it will have on our practice.

The Apostle St. John has summed it up in one word, and that is the keeping God's commandments: *This is the love of God* (says he) *that we keep his commandments*, 1 John v. 3. Where the Apostle plainly makes the keeping God's commandments to be a sure and never-failing consequence of this love to God,—that by which the true and sincere love of God is distinguished from all counterfeit pretences:—For, if we love God, we shall of course be very diligent in serving and obeying him; and, on the other hand, if we do not serve and obey Him as we ought, if we make

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no scruple to break his commandments, it is a most certain argument that we have no sincere or real love towards Him.

We see then what must be the proof we are to give of our affection to Almighty God:— We must shew it in the general conduct of our life, and in the whole course of our actions, by keeping his commandments.

But, for a more particular account of the genuine fruits and effects of this love of God, and that we may be the better able to judge whether we have it or not, we may consider the influences it will have upon our practice under the following respects.

1. If we love God, we shall be very diligent, at all times, and desirous to please Him.

This (we know) is always the effect of that love which one man bears to another: And who is there that has a friend or brother whom he dearly loves, and is not fond of taking all occasions to do the most pleasing and acceptable things to him?

If then we really love God with that sincere affection we would be thought to do, we shall be always endeavouring to do those things which we apprehend to be most pleasing and agreeable in his sight:—*Ye are my friends,* (says our Blessed Saviour) *if ye do whatsoever I*

*command you:—*And again : *If ye love me (says he) keep my commandments.*—It is ridiculous to say we love God, if we go on daily and wilfully to affront Him :—For he that does not use his best endeavours to please Him can never be truly said to love Him. Again,

2dly, As this love of God must shew itself in the doing of his will, so likewise in the suffering of it,—in bearing with meekness, and with patience, whatsoever God is pleased to lay upon us.—This is a duty which we owe Him as the Sovereign Lord and Ruler of the world, who orders every thing after the counsel of his own will, but still with the most perfect wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. An absolute submission and resignation to his will, therefore, is one very reasonable and necessary effect of that love we bear towards Him.

Farther, yet, 3dly, another fruit or consequence of the love of God will be a sincere and hearty love towards our neighbour.

And these two graces are so inseparably linked together, that the Holy Scriptures teach us it is impossible for the one to be without the other.

If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, (says St. John) he is a liar : For he, that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how
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can he love God whom he hath not seen? And again, This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

1 John iv. 20.

There is, indeed, no better way of shewing our love to God than by living and endeavouring to do all the good we can to others for his sake.—This is the most proper way wherein we can express our gratitude to our Creator, by loving and assisting, by comforting and relieving of his creatures:—*My goodness extendeth not unto thee, (says the Royal Psalmist) but to the Saints which are upon the earth.* We can never express our love to God by any thing that can be really advantageous to him: But we may be helpful and beneficial to our brethren by relieving of their wants, or comforting them in their afflictions, or assisting them in their distress: And this is the return which God requires, and it is the only one we can make for all his goodness and compassion towards us.

If therefore we would demonstrate our love to God, we must do it by all the several ways of kindness and benevolence towards our neighbour:—And he that wants this proof of his affection to his Maker, it is all in vain that he pretends to it. The love of God is such a du-

ty as can never consist with any degree of hatred or uncharitableness towards men : And that of the Apostle, 1 John iii. 17, may, without question, justly be applied to all other cases wherein we shew a want of love and charity towards our brother :—*Who so hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ?*

Again, 4thly, next to that of love and charity towards our neighbour,—another proof we ought to give of our affection to Almighty God is the constant and devout exercise of the duties of piety and religion.

He that truly and sincerely loves God will delight to worship Him both in public and in private, and will be ready to embrace all opportunities of drawing near unto Him, whether in prayer, reading his Holy Word, or partaking of the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These are the several ways whereby the good and pious Christian maintains a spiritual intercourse with his Maker :—And these, indeed, are the only ways whereby we are permitted to approach Him here in this life.

It was this that gave the Royal Psalmist such an ardent desire after the House of God,
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and made him esteem it as a great misfortune, when he was kept back from paying his devotions there,—as we find him expressing his complaint, Pf. lxxxiv. *My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord;—for a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.—How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.*

5. And lastly, another fruit or effect of the love of God will be an earnest desire of being for ever with Him, and enjoying Him in the life to come;—for how is it possible for a man to love God, and not desire to dwell for ever in his presence? It is this, as I before observed, that makes up the felicity of heaven;—and surely, therefore, he must have a very mean opinion of that future happiness, who does not earnestly desire and wish for it above all things in the world.

But here it may be necessary to observe, that this desire of future happiness above all things is not to be computed by the warmth and ardency of our affections upon times, so much as by the habitual power and prevalence of it upon our general conduct. The things of this world, which immediately and strongly strike our senses, do what we can, perhaps, will still more warmly and sensibly affect

affect us, though not more powerfully, than those of the other;—and the reason is, because these things, being at a distance and invisible to us, can only be made present to our minds by the help of reason and consideration; the impressions thereof, though they may be more lasting and powerful, yet they are not so quick and violent as the impressions of sense;—and therefore good people are very often mistaken, with respect to this duty of loving God above all things, when they pass a judgment on themselves from the present warmth or ardency of their affection, rather than from the constant and lasting effect of it upon their hearts and lives; for the one, even when it is present, may be only the effect of an heated imagination, and, when absent or less sensible, may, nevertheless, have its proper force and influence upon the conduct of our lives.—And this is the rule, therefore, which the Apostle gives us, whereby to try our love to God, whether it be real and effectual or not:—*This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*;—and so our Saviour Christ Himself: *If ye love me, keep my commandments*:—*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*: Hereby giving us a plain and certain rule to go by, that we
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may avoid all scruple and doubtfulness in this matter.—

The sum is, that, if we love God as we ought, or hope to be admitted to his presence and his kingdom in the life to come, we must walk in all the ways of his commandments here, and labour more and more to attain all those Christian graces and virtues which may make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the life to come.—

And thus I have gone through the third general head of this discourse, and shewn you what are the proper fruits and effects of the love of God, and the influence it will have upon our practice; and the application I shall make at present of this discourse is briefly to exhort you to be mindful of this great and necessary duty, this *first and great commandment* of the Law, as our Blessed Saviour calls it in my text, *to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

As a proof or testimony of this love of God, let us be sure to bring forth the happy fruits of it in an holy life and conversation;—by a chearful and ready obedience to his commands;—by love and charity towards our neighbour;—by a constant and devout exercise

cise of the duties of piety and religion ;—
and by setting our affections on the things
above, where God for ever sits and reigns.

So shall we be happy here in this life, in
the favour of that God whose loving-kind-
ness is better than life itself, and who hath
promised that no good thing will He with-
hold from those that walk uprightly :—So
shall we be infinitely happier in the life to
come, where (as the Holy Scriptures tell us)
*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath
it entered into the heart of man to conceive,
what God hath prepared for them that love
Him.*

To which most blessed and glorious state
God of his infinite mercy bring us all, thro'
Jesus Christ our Lord :—To whom, &c.

SECOND

S E C O N D P A R T.

I Come now to the fourth thing proposed,—which was to offer some motives and considerations proper to engage us to the love of God.

There are, indeed, a great many powerful motives that may serve to engage us to this duty,—the chief of which may (I think) be reduced to the following heads:

1. We shall see infinite reason to love God, when we consider the inexpressible goodness of Almighty God to us and all his creatures.

For has He not made and formed us out of nothing? Do we not owe our very life and being, and every thing that we enjoy, to his unmerited bounty? Who, when He wanted nothing to complete his own happiness, did, out of his abundant goodness, create mankind on purpose to make them happy, if so be their own perverseness do not frustrate these his gracious intentions.

The whole creation, is, indeed, no less an instance of the goodness, than of the power and wisdom of the great Artificer: How is every thing therein contrived for the subsistence

ence and support, nay, and even the delight and happiness of all his creatures?

If we turn our thoughts from the creation to the providence of God, what infinite reason shall we see to love and to adore Him, who sustains us every moment of our lives; who has upheld us from our very infancy, preserved us from innumerable dangers, delivered us from so many evils, and crowned us with so many blessings; and all this, perhaps, though we have oftentimes rebelled against Him, and returned his loving-kindness with ingratitude and provocation.

But, above all, the goodness of Almighty God is seen in providing for us an happiness beyond the present life, and the gracious means which he affords us in order to our obtaining of it;—in sending his Son into the world for the recovery of lost mankind, to instruct us in the knowledge of our duty, and assist us, by his grace, to the performance of it; to be a propitiation and atonement for our sins, our great Advocate and Intercessor with his Father: In short, to train us up to that way of living here which may make us meet to be partakers of that state of glory which he hath purchased for us, and will bestow upon us hereafter,—if so be we are not wanting

wanting to ourselves, and, by our own perverseness, disappoint and frustrate all the means of our salvation.

These, then, and such-like considerations of the Divine goodness, are the proper motives of our love to God; and, if duly and frequently attended to, cannot but awaken in every well-disposed mind (at least) some generous sparks of this Divine affection. It is for want of these reflections often and seriously renewed, that we find our hearts thus cold and insensible towards our greatest Benefactor. Men are, for the most part, so taken up with the blessings of life, that they scarce ever think upon the Author of them, or remember whence they have received them; whereas, would they but consider who it is that gives them every thing that they enjoy at present, and all that they can hope hereafter, it were impossible but so much goodness must create within them some degrees of a reciprocal affection, and people would as naturally incline to love God, as they now do their father, or their friend, or chiefest benefactor. This would certainly be the case, if all other obstacles were removed, and did not our sins interpose to create a dread and terror in us; for it must not be forgotten, that

we shall never be able to love God as we ought, if we pursue such a course of life as must of necessity put us out of favour with Him, and expose us to his anger and displeasure. Be his goodness never so great in itself, it will excite no love in us, if, at the same time, we have but too much reason to dread his justice; but, on the contrary, where the mind is once set free from the slavery of sin, then every argument to the love of God will have its proper weight with us, and every instance of the Divine goodness, which we experience in the course of our lives, will be a new incentive to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind.

But, 2dly, another motive to the love of God is to consider the excellency of the duty itself;—it is the first and great commandment of the Law,—a duty the most acceptable to God, and most beneficial to ourselves.

It will render all the other duties of religion easy to us, and, at the same time, recommend them with advantage to the favour and acceptance of Almighty God;—where there is an hearty and sincere love of God, all endeavours to please Him will be graciously accepted.—This is certainly the best
and

and noblest principle of all goodness, as it renders our obedience free, and voluntary; and unconstrained;—and nothing is capable to excite men to greater or more heroic acts of virtue than this Divine principle.

Where the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, it will naturally produce an earnest inclination and desire to please Him; it will be our meat and drink, as it was our Blessed Saviour's, to do the will of our Heavenly Father; and we shall find the same satisfaction in it as generous minds always do, when they have the opportunity to serve their dearest friends:—It is this Divine principle (in a word) that makes the blessed Angels themselves perform the will of their Creator with such alacrity and pleasure; and, the nearer we approach these happy Spirits in our love to God, so much the nearer shall we come to that perfection of obedience which we make the subject of our daily prayers, and shall be able, in some measure, to do the will of God *on earth, as it is done in heaven.*

And therefore, 3dly, and lastly, let this be another motive or consideration to excite us to the love of God,—I mean the great advantage and necessity of it to our future happiness:

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For it is certain that this, which is so much our duty now, shall make the chief ingredient of our happiness in the life to come;—and that, as we have more or less abounded in the love of God here, the more capable of happiness, the more blessed shall we (consequently) be in the enjoyment of Him hereafter.—

Hence it is that St. Paul, in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, prefers charity (by which is meant the love of God and of our neighbour) to all the other Christian graces:—*Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;—but the greatest of these is charity.*

And the reason is, because charity never faileth;—it shall never cease, either in this life or the life to come.—

The chief felicity of heaven (as we learn from Holy Scripture) shall consist in a nearer sight or union with God, in whose presence there is fulness of joy;—but we shall be utterly incapable of this joy, shall find no enjoyment even in heaven itself, unless we first learn to love God.—To dwell for ever in the presence of a Being whom we do not love would be an endless torment to us, rather than a blessing;—and therefore, if ever we desire to be happy in the life to come, we must

must learn to have a taste and relish of that future happiness;—we must learn to take delight and pleasure in the love of God, and in keeping his commandments.

What remains then but to exhort you to be mindful of that great commandment in my text,—*to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

How many reasons and motives there are to engage us to this duty is what we have already seen;—it remains only to apply them to their proper use, by endeavouring to excite and stir up in our hearts that Divine grace which we have now been recommending.

If, therefore, we have any spark of gratitude remaining in us;—and, if the love of God to us, expressed in such innumerable instances, has any force to kindle in our hearts a love to Him;—if the excellency of the duty itself has any charms to recommend it, —or the absolute necessity of it to our future happiness may, in point of interest, engage us to pursue it; upon all these accounts we have seen how much it behoves us diligently to cherish and improve within us a sincere and ardent love of God,

But, because our own endeavours would be vain and fruitless without the blessing and assistance of Almighty God,—let us pray him in the words of that excellent collect of our Church :—*O God, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy gracious promises which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.*

To God the Father, &c.

S E R-

S E R M O N VII.

Matth. xxii. 39, 40.

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love
thy neighbour as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the Law
and the Prophets.*

THESE words of our Saviour are part of his answer to a question that was put him by a certain Pharisee amongst the Jews.

The question was, (v. 36.) Master, which is the great commandment of the law?

This question was put him by one who was himself a lawyer, that is, a student and interpreter of the Law of Moses; and that tempting Him, that is, with a design to try his skill, and judge of his abilities by his answer. And, probably, he expected that our Saviour should have said the Law of Sacrifices, or the Sabbath, or at least have singled out some one or other of the ten commandments, and given it a preference to the rest:—But, if

this were his expectation, he was quickly disappointed; for our Blessed Lord pitches upon that which in effect comprehended them all, and was the best security for an universal and intire obedience :

Jefus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

Nor does our Blessed Lord stop here, but adds farther, in the words of my text, *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.—On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*

There was a particular reason for Christ's enlarging his reply in this manner, as the man who asked the question was a Pharisee: For the Pharisees, though they boasted much of the love of God, and were mighty zealous in his service, yet they appeared by all their conduct to be greatly defective in this other duty, the love they owed their neighbour:—Their character is given us in brief by Christ himself, Matth. xxiii. 14. that, though for a pretence they made long prayers, yet, at the same time, they devoured widows houses.

To such as these, therefore, our Saviour did well to declare, that, though the first and great commandment

commandment was the loving God, yet there was another very like unto it, and which came very near it in dignity and worth; and that these two duties had so close a connection with each other, that they ought no more to be separated than the two tables of the Law;—*for on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*

Having therefore, in my last discourse, considered the first of these two great duties, which is the love of God, I shall now proceed to the other,—*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

And here it will be necessary to inquire,

1st, Who is here meant by our neighbour?

And, 2dly, What it is to love him as ourselves.

1. Who is here meant by our neighbour?

And this is a question which we find determined for us by our Lord himself, Luke x. 29, where, when one had asked Him, upon a like occasion with this before us, *And who is my neighbour?* He immediately replies by putting the parable of the good Samaritan, who afforded succour and relief to a Jew in his distress, though the Jews and Samaritans were strangers, and even at variance and enmity with one another:—By which our Saviour meant to teach us, that every person whatso-

ever, even the greatest stranger, and the greatest enemy to us, is so far to be looked on as our neighbour, as that we ought not to deny them the common offices of humanity, but are required to wish them well, and do them good, as the opportunities present for doing it. And so says St. Paul expressly, *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all:*—However, not to all alike, or indiscriminately: For there is a preference due to some above others, as the Apostle presently adds, *especially to them who are of the household of faith.* The Jews, indeed, in our Saviour's time, were but too fond of an ill-natured maxim, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy*, as if they thought the one as lawful as the other.—But this our Blessed Lord has expressly condemned, and given his disciples a very different lesson, Matth. v. 43, *I say unto you, Love your enemies:—Do good to them that hate you.* Nor was this behaviour towards enemies less required under the Old Testament than the New, as appears plainly from that remarkable precept, Ex. xxiii. 3, 4.

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burthen, and wouldst forbear

bear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.

So far were they from being allowed to take a malicious pleasure in seeing the distresses of an enemy, that they were commanded to help him out of them: And this, indeed, is the ready way to make him cease to be an enemy, if he has either gratitude or ingenuity remaining in him. It is to heap coals of fire upon his head, (as the Apostle expresses it) which will be most likely to melt down his hatred into a desire of friendship and reconciliation: For a man must be a brute, indeed, who will not suffer himself to be overcome by the most generous offices of kindness.

What has been said is designed to shew, that by the word *neighbour*, in the text before us, we are to understand all mankind without exception, all with whom we have any dealing or correspondence.

Proceed we to the second head of inquiry,—What it is to love our neighbour as ourselves?

To love our neighbour, then, is sincerely to desire his happiness and welfare, and to endeavour to promote it, as we have opportunity and ability. The only difficulty is in the measure or degree of that love which is here required:—And for this it is to be observed that
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the particle *as* sometimes signifies an *equality*, sometimes only a *likeness* or *resemblance*.

Now that it cannot here mean an equality of affection, that we should love our neighbour to the same degree as we do ourselves, seems clear:—Because this would be to go contrary to nature, and, in truth, to require an impossibility, self-love being by the wise order of Providence implanted in the heart of man, as the strongest and most intimate affection of the soul, that he might thereby be determined, before all things else, to seek his own preservation and his own happiness. And, indeed, without this care of particular persons for themselves, the whole would no more subsist than it can without some care and some regard for one another.—

We may be allowed therefore to love ourselves in the first place, if we love our neighbour in the second; nor does the command to love our neighbour as ourselves import that we should love him with an equal affection as we love ourselves, no more than the command *to be holy as God is holy* implies an equality of holiness with God: A likeness or resemblance is all that can be meant in either case, though it is certain that our love to our neighbour must bear a much nearer proportion

tion to that love we bear ourselves, than our imperfect holiness can possibly reach towards that of God.—

I must observe, however, that self-love, which is the strongest passion in the heart of man, and placed there by the Author of our beings for very wise and good purposes, will be no obstruction to the love of our neighbour, if we take care to direct it right:—For, if we love ourselves as we ought, we shall love our souls above our bodies, and be more concerned for our eternal interests than temporal; and thus our affections, being weaned from the things of this world, will be the more readily engaged in promoting the interests of our neighbour, and doing him all the good we can.

But, as the precept in my text does not oblige us to love others with the same degree of affection as we do ourselves, so neither, secondly, does it oblige us to love all mankind alike.

This, too, is a thing scarce possible, or, were it possible, would by no means be allowable; because we are under greater obligations to love some than others, either of natural relation, of gratitude, or other ties
and

and engagements, which call for a proportional degree of love.

Our religion, indeed, requires us to love all men, even our enemies; that is, to bear no hatred or ill-will to any, but sincerely to desire their happiness, to wish them well, and do them good:—But we are not therefore required, against all the rules of reason and of prudence, to receive an enemy into our bosom, or to treat him with the same regards and kindness as we would our best and nearest friends.—And so again we are exhorted by St. Paul, *as we have opportunity, that we should do good to all*; but not to all alike, surely; for nothing could be more unjust than such a blind and undistinguishing behaviour,—and therefore the Apostle presently adds (to shew there was a preference to some above others) *especially to them who are of the household of faith*.—There is a judgment of discretion, then, left to every one in these cases, to act differently in the bestowing kindnesses and favours, according to the different merit of persons, or his own peculiar obligations.

In general, then, we shall fully answer the extent and obligation of this precept in my text, if, in the

1st place, we abstain from doing wrong or injury to any person whatever; and,

2. If, towards all persons, as we have opportunity (according to St. Paul) that is, as Providence puts the occasions in our way, and according to our several capacities and obligations, we be ready and willing to do good.

1. We must abstain from doing wrong or injury to any person whatsoever:—*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour* (says the Apostle) *therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, Rom. xiii. 10.*

Our Blessed Saviour hath absolutely forbidden us to do evil, though it be but in return for evil. We must do nothing, even to the worst and greatest of our enemies, that looks like malice or revenge:—*Ye have heard, says our Blessed Master, that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil;—that is, you must not return one injury by doing of another, nor seek for satisfaction of a wrong received,*

received, in such a manner as may serve to gratify a present passion, or an implacable humour of revenge. It is more becoming of a Christian to bear two injuries with patience, than to be guilty of doing but one; and, as we are to remember that these precepts of our Saviour were given to all without exception, and are such as every one ought to practise towards every one,—it is beyond all doubt that such a mutual tenderness and forbearance of each other must needs be for the benefit of all. But, however others may behave towards him, it is unquestionably the duty of a Christian to be kindly affectioned towards them (as St. Paul exhorts) and to abstain from being the author or occasion of drawing any mischief on the heads of others, as far as it can possibly be avoided, and where it is not necessary either to the satisfaction of public justice, or to his own just defence and vindication, in a case that may require it;—otherwise he directly contradicts that rule of love and charity which is set before us in my text.—

Nor is it only necessary to abstain from doing wrong, but he must be likewise ready to do good,—as the opportunities present for doing it, and as his abilities will reach.

It is a great mistake to think that we have discharged our duty to our neighbour, if we do him no injustice; if we abstain from fraud or violence, so that our consciences, upon reflection, do not accuse us of doing wrong: And this, it is true, is some degree of goodness; nay, as the world goes, no inconsiderable degree; yet still it is but a negative goodness;—it is to think ourselves good, merely because we are not bad.

Whereas we should remember, that the Gospel lays upon us plain and positive injunctions to do good: *To do good and to communicate forget not* (says the Apostle) *for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*: And again, *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men*. And, as our Saviour Christ Himself, the great pattern for our imitation, employed the precious hours of his time in doing good, so we learn, from that account which He hath given us of the day of Judgment, that we shall then be made to answer not only for the wrongs or injuries that we have done to others, but even for the omissions of our duty, if we had it in our power to do good, and did it not: *I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat, thirsty, and ye gave me no drink,*—says that Divine Teacher,—
and

and proceeds to mention other instances of an hard-hearted and uncharitable temper, which would exclude men from the kingdom of heaven, and bring upon them a sentence of condemnation at the last day.—

There is then a positive obligation laid upon all Christians not only to abstain from doing wrong, but to lay out their endeavours in doing good,—that is, in short, to be as useful in their generation as they can, and so to answer that great end for which they were sent into the world: For it concerns us to remember, that man was not sent into this world like the Leviathan in the waters, merely to take his pastime therein, but to live like a reasonable creature, and to answer the wise end for which God created him,—which, in the view of reason and Christianity, is this:—That, by improving himself in the practice of every virtue, and by a diligent discharging the duties of that station (whatever it be) wherein the Providence of God hath placed him, he may contribute to the general good and happiness of mankind in this world, and so prepare himself for that better society, that state of happiness and glory in the world to come, which (through the mediation of our ever-blessed Redeemer) God hath promised to all those

those who believe, and serve and obey Him; or (to give it in the words of my text) who love the Lord their God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves; and shew forth the fruits of this love in the course and conduct of their lives.

What remains then (that I may close up this discourse with a brief application) but that we cherish in our hearts this love for others, which the Gospel so expressly makes our duty; as that, in the first place, we carefully abstain from doing wrong or injury to any; and, next, that we delight in offices of kindness and humanity, and be ready, upon all occasions, to do good: That we make it our daily practice, as the Prophet exhorts, and God requires, to do justice, and to love mercy;—and both these from a principle of duty, and in obedience to the will of Him who has thus commanded, and requires it of us: That we walk humbly with our God: That we consider Him as the great Creator and Ruler of the world, the Almighty Father of men and angels, from whom we have received our very being, and that capacity of happiness wherein he hath placed us: And that we learn to love Him, therefore, in the first place, with all our heart, and soul, and mind:—And that, in the next

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place, we consider other men as our brethren, the off-spring of the same common Parent, and stamped with the same image of their Maker; and that we therefore learn to love our neighbour as ourselves:—*On these two commandments* (says our Blessed Lord) *hang all the Law and the Propbets.*—They contain the whole substance of the precepts of the Law, and are enforced upon us with peculiar motives under the Gospel,—where the love of God to mankind, in sending his Son into the world to redeem us, is set before us as a most persuasive argument to love God and one another:—*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,* says our Saviour, *if ye have love one to another.*—

I conclude all with that excellent collect of our Church:—*O God, who has taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth, send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee:—Grant this for the sake of thine only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.—Amen.*

To God, &c.

S E R-

S E R M O N VIII.

Matt. xii. 36, 37.

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of Judgment.

For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

THE occasion of these words of our Saviour was the blasphemy of the Pharisees, when they had heard of that miracle he wrought by casting out a devil from one that was blind and dumb, and restoring him in a moment to his sight and speech.

The multitude, who had seen the miracle performed, were justly astonished at it, and took it, in its proper light, as a full testimony to our Saviour's character; saying, *Is not this the Son of David?* i. e. the Christ or the Messiah. But the Pharisees, who had entertained invincible prejudices against Him, since they could not, with any colour of reason, de-

ny the miracle, were resolved to elude the force of it, however, by ascribing it to the worst of causes,—saying, *He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the Prince of the devils.*

This strange and spiteful calumny, so contrary to the very design of all our Saviour's teaching, (which was to destroy the Devil's empire in the world, and to make men holy, just, and good) could not but draw from Him a very severe reproof in the following verses of this chapter.

He tells them, that if they could thus stand out against the greatest and most apparent miracles, (for such was that which he had wrought, the restoring a man that was blind and dumb in a moment to his sight and speech, and that in presence of a multitude of people;) I say, if they could thus stand out against so great a miracle, nay more, if they would perversely ascribe to the Devil what had all the marks and signs of being wrought by the Holy Spirit of God; their madness was incurable, and there were no further means that could be used for their conversion:—That this was to blaspheme the Holy Ghost,—a sin incapable of pardon, because they who could be guilty of it must resist all possible means of conviction,

conviction, and so were utterly incapable of repentance.

He reminds them yet further, that such blasphemous and wicked speeches unquestionably proceeded from a corrupt and wicked heart ;—and that, how light soever they might make of them, how heedlessly soever they might fall into them, they should be surely made to answer for them in the last great day :—That, for every idle word that men should speak, they must give account in the day of Judgment ;—That by their words they should be justified, and by their words they should be condemned.

Having thus laid open the occasion of the words of my text, I shall proceed in the following discourse to make some useful observations and reflections on them.

And, first, from the incident which gave occasion to the words before us, we may learn how dangerous a thing it is to speak reproachfully, or even slightly, and in a way disparaging of our Saviour's miracles :—For these were the great proof He gave of his Divine mission and character, and consequently of the truth of those doctrines which He came to preach amongst men.

To these it is He constantly appeals, as

may be seen in several places of the Sacred History :—*If I do not the works of my Father, (says he) believe me not ; but, if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.*—As if he had said,—If I do not such works as plainly evidence a Divine power, then you have full liberty to reject the doctrines which I teach :—But, if I do, how little soever you are inclined to credit me, yet let the works themselves convince you. The great crime the Jews were guilty of in rejecting Him turned plainly upon this point, that they had so many great and unexampled miracles done amongst them, and yet still remained incorrigible and unbelievers :—*If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin ; but now they have no cloke for their sin.*—In short, this was that which drew down that remarkably severe sentence on Chorazin and Bethsaida, and those other cities where our Blessed Lord had wrought so many mighty works without effect,—*That it should be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, and even Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of Judgment, than for them.*—

From all which we learn how great a stress our Saviour laid upon the miracles which He performed, as a proof of his being the Messiah, and of the truth of his doctrine ;—and how

near

near they approach to that crime of the Pharisees who speak disparagingly of our Saviour's miracles.—This they did as the most effectual way to put a stop to the success of his doctrine:—A sin which we see, in the judgment of our Saviour, tends to cut off all hopes of forgiveness, and that for this plain reason, because it leaves no place or room for repentance:—For surely, if miracles have not force enough to convince men, nothing will.—And they, who deny miracles to be any proof of the truth of a doctrine, would do well to consider, whether they do not hereby preclude God himself from a possibility of making any revelation of his will to man. At least the only way which God has hitherto been pleased to make use of to this purpose is that of miracles; for prophecy is but a species of miracles, however in some respects we have been used to consider it as distinct from them.

But thus much for my first observation, how sinful and how dangerous a thing it is to speak reproachfully, or even slightly and irreverently, of our Saviour's miracles; since they were the great proof he gave of his Divine authority, and consequently of the truth of that religion which he came to preach and publish to the world.

I may observe, secondly, from the occasion of the words, viz. the blasphemy of the Jews which our Saviour here reproves, we may conclude, that by the idle words here mentioned cannot be meant every needless or unprofitable word, and such as does not directly tend to our own or others edification:—But every wicked word, (in short) every word by which we transgress our duty, either to God, our neighbour, or ourselves.—And so it is that some copies read it, *πάν ῥημα πονηρὸν*, *every wicked word*, that men shall speak, they must give account thereof in the day of Judgment.—The word *πονηρὸν*, or *wicked*, indeed, is supposed by some learned men not to belong to the text, but to be put in the margin by way of interpretation.—Be it so then:—But this, however, is a plain proof that they who placed it there believed that the text must be so interpreted and understood;—and so, indeed, it ought to be:—For, were we to give account of every needless and unnecessary word that may chance to fall from us in common conversation, and were it to be charged upon us as a sin, who is there of a free and affable conversation could be innocent? This would be to put a stop at once to all that chearful freedom of discourse which is so great a pleasure
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in life, and which, moreover, tends apparently to promote good neighbourhood and friendship, and to reconcile the minds of men to one another. And, therefore, it is observable, that they who have embraced this notion of the guilt of idle or unnecessary words have fallen into the contrary extreme of a sullen and morose behaviour; which is so far from being agreeable to the Christian precepts, that it is directly opposite and contrary to them.

Let no good Christian, therefore, entertain such fears or scruples, as if he was guilty of those idle words condemned by our Blessed Saviour, as long as he keeps within the bounds of innocence in his discourse, and neither transgresses his duty to God, his neighbour, or himself.—A chearful harmless mirth is so far from being a reproach to religion, or inconsistent with the character of a good Christian, that it renders it amiable and lovely in the sight of others.

But, 3dly, we may observe, in general, that we must give account of our words, as well as actions, in the day of Judgment.—This is a thing so clear, that it needs no proof;—and, indeed, our Saviour's declaration in my text is full and express to this purpose;—but, though it needs no proof, it is what

what the generality of Christians have great need to be put in mind of, because they seem to make too light of words, as if the transgressions of the tongue were light and pardonable faults, and such as might be easily passed by.

But, in reality, were we to make a true estimate of this matter, we should find, that the greatest mischiefs in the world may be, and often are, occasioned by an ill use of the tongue.

What is it that keeps vice of any sort in countenance, and makes men run into the practice of it without shame or scruple, but that, perhaps, they have often heard it represented by their lewd companions, as a small or indifferent thing, and, by degrees, as fashionable or commendable? And thus a corruption of morals soon spreads itself over the unwary and unexperienced, by the means of a deluding and unbridled tongue.

A corruption of principles spreads itself, with ease and with success, in the same way; and a bold thing said against religion, if with sprightliness or seeming wit, shall do great mischief on the weak and injudicious, and make such wrong impressions on their minds

as wiser men, perhaps, with all the arguments of reason, shall not be able to remove.

But what shall we say then? Can we suppose that such unruly talkers have no guilt to answer for? Certainly, if the guilt of any sin is to be estimated by the mischief it occasions and is naturally productive of, there can scarce be a greater sin than this.

But, perhaps, it may be pleaded in excuse for those vain talkers, that they often fall into it heedlessly and without design; they have no malicious intention in what they say, nor are they aware of the ill consequences which we suppose to follow from it.

Here, then, we must take leave to raise a 4th observation from the text, which is this,—that even rash and heedless words, that proceed from any vicious habit of the mind, will certainly be charged against us in the day of Judgment.

These, indeed, may properly enough be called idle words, as being the fruits of negligence or inadvertency, such as men fall into of course (as it were) and without design, being made customary to them by familiar practice; but will this excuse them in the sight of God? Can it be any apology for the common swearer, or the common liar, (for example)

example) that he is arrived to such a habit in this sin, as to be guilty of it, even when he does not think of it? No, certainly.—The sinful habit was contracted wilfully; and this makes all the acts that follow from it (in some sort) wilful too, and justly chargeable upon him: It is plain, in this case, that there must be some bitter root in the heart, from whence those bitter waters flow; for it is *out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh.*

5thly, Let us remark (and it is highly worthy our observation) how express our Blessed Saviour is in saying, as to the last and general Judgment, that, *by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned;* and so in other places as expressly, that men shall be judged and receive their final recompence *according to their works;* that *all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.*

A strange doctrine will some say,—and how shall we reconcile it with the common notion of justification, or that plain declaration of St. Paul:—*Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds*

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of the Law ;—and, in other places, that we are justified freely by the grace of God, and through the redemption of Christ,—not of works, lest any man should boast.

But, if we shall be justified *by our works*, (as our Saviour says expressly) then we must be justified by our works : And what becomes of the doctrine of St. Paul, that *we are justified freely by grace, and not by works ?*

The truth is, nothing is more easy than to reconcile the doctrine of Christ with that of St. Paul ; for they speak of justification in a quite different respect. Our Saviour speaks of what is necessary to justify us at the last day, when we should undoubtedly be judged, and receive our final sentence, either of happiness or of misery, according to our works,—or according as we have behaved ourselves in this world, as we have pursued the ways of piety and virtue, or turned aside to the lewd courses of a profligate and wicked life.

But St. Paul, on the other hand, speaks of our first justification, or our being put into a justified state, immediately upon our becoming Christians ; and this, indeed, is a mere act of grace ;—it is the free bounty and mercy of Almighty God, through the redemption of our Saviour Christ, admitting us into
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the Christian covenant, and to all the benefits and privileges of it; the pardon of our sins; the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to enable us to persevere in our Christian faith, if we make a right use of it; and the hopes of heaven and everlasting happiness, upon our final perseverance in it.—

These (I say) are the benefits and privileges to which we are admitted, upon our first embracing of Christianity;—and these are all conferred upon us freely, through the grace or mercy of God, and through the merits of Christ: *Not of works*, says the Apostle, *lest any man should boast*;—for sure we could contribute nothing to it by any works of ours, which we might or could have done before our becoming Christians.—Children who are baptised, and so admitted into the Christian covenant, in their infancy, have no works, either good or bad, (we know) to boast of;—and even grown persons, if there be any such amongst us, who can be supposed to have lived without Christ in the world till they arrived at a state of manhood, and are then converted to Christianity; I say, even these could have no works to boast of performed before their conversion, that should intitle them to the blessings and privileges to which they

they are admitted by becoming Christians:—No, it would be still the free grace and mercy of Almighty God, and that alone, to pardon all their past sins, and to admit them, upon their faith and repentance, to the hopes of salvation. And this was the condition both of Jews and Heathens, who, in St. Paul's time, were converted to Christianity,—and whom he therefore puts in mind (the Jews more especially, who laid great dependence on the Law of Moses) that it was *by faith* they were *justified*, *by grace* they were *saved*, *through the redemption which was in Christ Jesus*;—i. e. that it was by their embracing of the Christian faith that they were put into a state of salvation, had their past sins graciously forgiven, stood justified and accepted in the sight of God, and all through the merits of Christ, who had obtained these mighty privileges for such as would believe his Gospel, and become true and sincere Christians.

But then, when the Apostle comes to treat of what was necessary to their continuance in this justified state, he plainly lays the stress upon their leading Christian lives, as well as persevering in the Christian faith:—He speaks with abhorrence of those who would abuse
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the mercy offered in the Gospel to their encouraging themselves in sin : *What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.* He tells them, *that the wrath of God was revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ;—that the very design of that Gospel which they had now embraced was to teach them, that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ;* nay, that the very end, for which Christ gave himself for us an offering or sacrifice to God, was, *that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

Thus then we see the doctrine of St. Paul, which, in this view of it, is perfectly reconcilable with that of our Saviour in my text.

And so, I shall take leave to add, is the doctrine of our Church concerning justification,—which, if rightly understood, will be found to be exactly the same with the doctrine of St. Paul.

For when it is said, in the 11th Article, that we are justified by faith only ;—in the 12th, that good works are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification ;—and, in the
13th,

13th, that we can do no good works, in a Christian sense, before we believe in Christ, that is, before our justification;—it is very plain that our Church speaks (with the Apostle St. Paul) of our first justification only, *i. e.* of the forgiveness of our sins, and our being admitted to the grace and privileges of the Gospel, immediately upon our becoming Christians.

It is further observable that, in the 17th Article, where the several steps of a Christian's progress towards heaven are distinctly described, he is said, after being thus justified freely, to walk religiously in good works: This (in short) is a condition absolutely necessary to his full and final justification at the last day, that, through the mercy of Almighty God, he may at length attain to everlasting felicity.

To conclude this discourse,—it is of the last importance to the good conduct of life to have some fixed and certain principles, and those such as are right and good; and these, by being well pursued, will, by degrees, introduce good habits, from whence will proceed an uniformity of behaviour, both in words and actions, agreeable to this happy frame and temper of the mind: Some little

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irregular starts, indeed, may appear sometimes, even in persons of the best dispositions and the best intentions; for an absolute perfection is not to be hoped for here in this life; but these, however, will be soon corrected, and the general course and tenor of a Christian's life will be conformable to the goodness of his principles and the good disposition of his heart and affections.

Let us remember, then, as a matter of the highest moment, that we should have our minds or hearts impressed with a sincere piety towards God, a principle of justice and charity towards others, a love of temperance and sobriety, and every virtue that respects ourselves;—and therefore our Blessed Saviour, who knew the best way to make us truly good, has directed his precepts more especially towards rectifying the vicious habits and disorders of the mind;—He pronounces a blessing upon the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart; and resolves the whole of our duty into those two great principles, which He knew to be the best security for our performing of it:—That we should *love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbour as ourselves.*

To God the Father, &c.

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S E R M O N IX.

Jerem. xxiii. 24.

Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

THERE is nothing that can awaken the mind of man into a better sense of his duty, or a more conscientious care of all his actions, than to consider himself as in the continual presence of Almighty God; to reflect that there is one above him who is always near him, and whose eye observes whatever he does; whose ear is always open to what he says, and whose knowledge reaches even to the very thoughts of the heart, and spies out his most secret purposes and resolutions.

This is such a thought as, if well pursued, must needs have a good effect upon our lives, to deter us from all sin, and to quicken us in the practice of our duty. And hence it is that the Holy Scriptures, in so many places,

set before us this important doctrine, but in none more clearly than in the words of my text:

Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

The words contain this plain and useful doctrine, which is of the highest moment for us to consider,—that God is present every-where, and that He sees or knows all things.

Not that God seeth as man seeth by the help of bodily eyes, which would be to limit and restrain his sight: But that He himself is present every-where in his own spiritual and unbounded nature, and that He understands and perceives whatsoever is done in the world.

For though, the knowledge and the presence of God are considered by us as two distinct perfections, yet have they an inseparable relation to each other. It is because He is every-where present, that He perceives and knows all things: And again, his knowing all things is a most certain argument that He is every-where present. Well, therefore, might the Prophet join these two together in the words of my text:

Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. No: This must

must needs be impossible: For am not I every-where present: *Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.*

This, then, being the plain meaning of the words before us,—let us,

1st, Consider the doctrine of my text:—
And then, 2dly, endeavour to make the proper uses and improvement of it.

And, 1st, the doctrine of my text is this:—
That God is present every-where, and that He sees or knows all things.

Now the truth of this will appear evident by considering the nature and perfections of Almighty God. That He who made all things and places whatsoever cannot possibly be excluded out of any seems to be a plain and obvious conclusion, even in reason: For what should exclude that being from his presence, who made, preserves, and governs all things? God never made any of his creatures independent on himself; but, wheresoever any of the creatures are, there must we likewise of necessity suppose the Almighty Creator himself to be, and to be always present; preserving by his power that creature in its proper place and being, without which it must dissolve, and fall into its first nothing again.

And accordingly thus it is that the Holy Scriptures speak of God as *preserving and upholding all things by the word of his power*:—*That in him we live, move, and have our being*; and that *by him all things consist*.—*Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord,* And thus the Psalmist likewise, Ps. cxxxix. 7, —*Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I go down to hell, behold, thou are there also: If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.* —*If I say peradventure the darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turned into day:—Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and the light to thee are both alike.* Nothing can be more full and clear to our purpose than these words of the Psalmist.

Indeed, as God is a being of all possible perfection, it follows, of necessity, that He must be every-where present: For, were there any place where God was not, his being would be
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limited and circumscribed like that of his creatures:—His power and knowledge must be lessened in proportion.—No attribute of the Deity (in short) can be absolutely perfect, unless He himself be infinite and immense.—As therefore God, by the mere excellency of his nature, exists throughout all time, past, present, and to come; so, by the same excellency of his nature, He must exist throughout all space:—And, as there can be no point of time when He was not, so there can be no place in the universe where He is not.—He is infinite in all his attributes and perfections, all-wise and powerful, all-knowing, eternal, and omnipresent.

It is true, indeed, that God is said, in Holy Scripture, to dwell in heaven, and to have fixed his throne and habitation there: He is said to look down from thence, and to hear in heaven, his dwelling-place.—

But these, and the like places of Holy Scripture, are to be understood of his glorious presence only:—I mean such a presence of God as is accompanied with an extraordinary manifestation of his glory.

For, though God be present every-where in his own spiritual and unbounded nature, yet he can manifest his presence more in one place

than another. He is present after a more peculiar manner in the assemblies and congregations of Christians, to hear their prayers and praises, and to dispense his grace and other blessings to them:—And He is present in a most glorious manner among his Saints and Holy Angels in heaven, which is therefore called the habitation of his holiness and glory.

But, though the glorious and majestic presence of God, be (as the Scripture tells us) placed above the heavens, yet his spirit or essence is equally subsisting through all the parts of the universe. Though heaven may be in a peculiar manner his throne, yet the earth is likewise, as the Psalmist well observes, his footstool; and He is alike infinitely and essentially present in both. There is no place that can shut him out, or exclude him from it: We cannot say He is here, and not there; but He is every-where in all places at once, after a most unspeakable manner, and such as we shall never be able to conceive or comprehend.

There are two things, however, that may help to give us some imperfect notion of this matter. One is to consider our own souls or spirits, which were made after the image of God: For God is a spirit, (as our Saviour tells us) an infinitely great and glorious spirit,
that

that governs the world with greater ease than our souls or spirits the several parts of our bodies, and knows more perfectly what is done in the world than we do what is done within ourselves. Let us consider, then, only the distance to which our sight reaches, when we survey the height and breadth of the heavens, and that far beyond the sun, even to the fixed stars, which are millions of miles distant from us; and let this help us to conceive a little of the sight or perception of God:—For as it is the soul or spirit that sees through the windows of the eyes, (the body, we know, being unable to see at all, when the soul or spirit is fled from it;) I say, if it be the soul or spirit that sees, if a created spirit be endued with such a faculty as this to perceive things at an immeasurable distance, who or what shall limit the great Creator himself from viewing the whole universe at once, which, compared to his immensity, is but as a span, (to use the words of the Prophet) or as the small dust of the balance, or a grain of sand? It is moreover observable, that, as our souls or spirits take up no room at all in our bodies, so neither does God, who is a spirit of infinitely greater purity, take up any room where he is, —but is present in all places of the world,
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and yet leaves to all bodily and material things their proper places.

Thus, then, even from our own souls or spirits, and those limited perfections God has given them, we may form some notion of that infinitely great and glorious Spirit, who made the world and governs it, and who is present in all places of the world at once, and sees or knows all things.—

There is another thing amongst the creatures of God that may help to give us some notion of the Divine omnipresence, and that is the light to which God is sometimes compared in Holy Scripture: *God is Light* (says the Apostle) *and in him is no darkness at all*. Now if the sun, which is only a creature of God's making, can dart his beams of light from one end of the heavens to the other in a few moments of time, as it were, what shall we think of God, the great Creator of light itself? Whither shall we go from his Spirit? Or whither shall we fly from his presence?

And let this suffice—to explain the doctrine of my text.—I proceed, in the 2d place, to make the proper uses and improvement of it.—

And,

And, 1st, The doctrine now before us is very useful to teach us the necessary virtues of sincerity and truth, and to shew us the extreme folly, as well as impiety, of a false and hypocritical behaviour, either towards God or man.

For if God be in all places of the world at once, and knows every thing that is done; if He knows the hearts of men, sees all the secret motions there, and understands our thoughts afar off; what can be greater folly than to play the hypocrite with Him, either by dissembling what we are, or pretending to be what we are not?

Be not deceived (says the Apostle) *God is not mocked*;—It is impossible to impose upon that wise and holy Being by any false appearances whatever;—He sees and observes our very inmost thoughts,—knows whether our piety be real and sincere, or whether (like the Jews of old) we only honour Him with our lips, whilst our hearts are far removed and alienated from Him.

And, as God sees all false pretences, so there is nothing which He more abhors; and hence it is that our Saviour in the Gospel, when He speaks of those who shall be condemned to greater punishment than others in
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the day of Judgment, He expresses it by this phrase, that *They shall have their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.*

It is therefore the great duty of a Christian to use an honest uprightness in his behaviour, both towards God and towards man;—to speak as we think, and to be what we profess: In short, to be really such as we desire to be esteemed, that so we may stand approved, not only in the sight of men, but God who trieth the heart.

Again, 2dly, the doctrine now before us, if well considered, would prove an excellent remedy against all sin whatever,—even the most secret sins,—and such as men fly to darkness, or a covert, to avoid the shame of a discovery;—for who is there that would be guilty of a sin, did he but seriously consider that the eyes of God are over him continually, beholding what he does?

Were we to stand but in the presence of some grave or venerable person, for whom we have the least respect, without question, we should behave ourselves with some degree of decency before him: How much more, then, should we have regard to what we say and do, when we stand continually in the presence of the great Judge of heaven and earth?

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Let the sinner consider with himself, that, whenever he transgresses the Divine commands, though he should retire to some secret corner of the world, where the eye of man can never reach him, yet the God of heaven is surely there,—his eyes will ever be upon him; and how dares he transact his guilt in such an awful presence as this?

Is there any one so foolish or so hardy as to commit a robbery or murder in the presence of a Judge, whom he knows to have full power to condemn him, and to bring him directly to execution? But is it not much more foolish and more dangerous to sin in the presence of God? He, who is the great Judge of heaven and earth, in whose hands is the power of life and death;—the one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy;—and yet, every time we commit a sin, we should remember that we do it before Him:—He looks upon it with abhorrence, and can, (if He pleases) in the very moment of our guilt, inflict that punishment upon us which our iniquity deserves:—How should we then tremble to offend, when conscious to ourselves that He whom we offend continually observes us? This, sure, is such a thought, as, if well pursued, must needs have
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a good effect upon our lives, to deter us from all manner of sin, and to keep us innocent in the midst of temptation.

3dly, The doctrine now before us will afford matter of comfort and support to a good Christian in every state or condition of life;—more especially in the time of any great calamity or affliction, when the world frowns upon him, and all earthly comforts fail and forsake him, it will be then his only consolation to reflect that God is always near him, and that he can never want the presence of the best of friends and comforters;—he may with confidence apply himself to Him, who is ever at hand to hear and defend him,—a very present help in trouble,—one who sees and pities the misfortunes of all those that are truly his, and will lend them his omnipotent arm, either to draw them out of it, or support them under it.—

This, therefore, was the prudent refuge of the good Psalmist:—*When I am in trouble (says he) I will think upon God; when my heart is vexed, I will complain to Him.*

4thly, therefore, the doctrine now before us will afford the greatest encouragement to the duty of prayer, and ought to make us serious and devout in the performance of it.

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This, we know, is the argument which our Saviour uses to recommend to us the duty of private prayer, that, though it be never so secretly performed, though we go into our closet and shut the door, yet God is surely present there, to see and to reward our devotions:—*Pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*—

And the same encouragement he likewise gives to public prayer:—*Where two or three are gathered together in my name* (says he) *there am I in the midst of them,*—to hear their prayers (no doubt) and answer their requests.

God, indeed, is more peculiarly present (as the Scripture tells us) *in the congregation of the saints,*—and therefore, when we meet together, in the house of God, to offer up our praises and devotions to him, the sense of his immediate presence ought naturally to create within us the most profound humility and devotion of spirit.—

When Jacob had seen God but in a vision only (Gen. xxviii. 16, 17.) we find what an effect it had upon him, and how it filled his soul with the deepest impressions of reverence and awe:—*He awaked out of his sleep* (says the text)

text) *and was afraid, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not: How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God.*

We have reason to say the same of every place that is set apart for the religious worship of Almighty God,—for God is surely there, and fills it with his gracious presence;—it is *none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven.*—And, therefore, if at any time we find our devotion slacken here, and our minds to wander off from what we are about,—we should endeavour to check them, and recall our absent thoughts with some such short reflection as this,—*Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.*—The sense of such an awful presence must needs excite and animate us afresh in the performance of our religious exercises, and will give new life and spirit to our devotions.—

Last of all, the doctrine now before us may convince us of the great equity and exactness of the future Judgment:—When He, who now sees and observes the actions of mankind, shall come to pass the final sentence on them at the last day, and shall render to every man according to his works.

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When we consider that God is every-where, and that his knowledge reaches to the very inmost thoughts and intentions of the heart: That He is about our paths and about our beds, and spieth out all our ways: That He knows even more of us than we do of ourselves, and there is nothing so secret which can possibly be concealed from Him: Surely we have abundant reason to believe that He will judge the world in righteousness, and the people with equity.

His wisdom and knowledge are such, that it is impossible to deceive him into a false judgment or apprehension of things:—His justice such as will not be corrupted, nor his power over-awed.—That false light in which we often see things here, and which makes men, the wisest, sometimes err in judgment, can have no place in the decisions of this great and infallible Judge,—who, as He is alone able, so He will then set right the errors and wrong judgments of men. Successful wickedness shall then at last receive its just deserts; a punishment the more sure and heavy, the longer time it was deferred.—All the sly arts of cunning and deceitful men shall then be openly detected:—The slanderer, who sheds his poison secretly in whispers, shall then be

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brought to loud and open shame:—Oppressed innocence shall lift up its head with joy, whilst the oppressor trembles, and shall not be able to stand in Judgment.

In a word, there is nothing so secret that shall not be made manifest, nor any thing so hidden and concealed (whether of our good or evil actions) that shall not be known and published, and a suitable reward assigned us in that great day, *when* (as the Apostle tells us, Rom. ii. 16.) *God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to his Gospel.*

To conclude all, therefore,—may the serious consideration of that great and awful day excite us to a diligent and conscientious care of all our actions. Let us not fondly encourage ourselves in the pursuits of sin with that vain boast of the wicked mentioned by the Psalmist, —*Surely the Lord will not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, says he, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that formed the eye, shall not He see? He that planted the ear, shall not He hear?* In vain is it that we hope to shun the sight of Him who fills all places with his presence:—We may fly from ourselves as soon as fly from God:—And our own conscience is not nearer to us, or more a witness of the things

things we do, than God is of all that we either act, or speak, or think.—To Him, therefore, who is both a witness and a judge of our behaviour, let us, above all things, endeavour to approve ourselves:—Let us walk, as in his sight here, in all the ways of piety and virtue; and so shall we be admitted to his glorious presence hereafter,—through the merits and mediation of our Blessed Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ:—To whom, &c.

S E R M O N X.

I John iii. 20, 21.

For, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

THE Apostle, in the foregoing verses of this chapter, had been shewing the great necessity that lies upon all Christians to evidence their faith by their practice, and by leading of a truly Christian life. And, amongst other arguments which he uses to this purpose, he tells them this was the only way whereby they could attain to any comfortable assurance of their being in a state of grace and favour with Almighty God, and that all their hopes without this would prove vain and delusive.

Little children, (says he) let no man deceive you: He that doeth righteousness is righteous.—
And again, verse 19, Hereby we know we are
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of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before God: It being the great advantage of an innocent and upright course of life, that it naturally produces a chearful hope and confidence towards God, an humble assurance of his favour, which is undoubtedly the greatest satisfaction and comfort in the world: Whereas, on the other hand, the remembrance of a wicked life is odious and intolerable, being generally followed with the lashes of a guilty conscience and the just apprehensions of God's displeasure.

And this is the plain import and meaning of my text: *For, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

If our heart condemn us,—that is, if our consciences condemn us, as living in any known and wilful course of sin; we may conclude that God, who knows a great deal more of us than we do of ourselves, does likewise assuredly condemn us.

But, *if our heart condemn us not,—i. e. if our consciences acquit us,—I mean not, acquit us of all sin or imperfection, (for that is impossible;) but if, upon a serious examination*

of our hearts and lives, we are conscious to ourselves that we have, for some time past, sincerely endeavoured to discharge our duty, without falling into any great or wilful and deliberate sins, or continuing in any known course or habit of sin; and that we have lived up in some measure to those rules and precepts God hath set us:—I say, if our own consciences shall thus acquit us,—then may we cheerfully hope that God will likewise graciously acquit us, through the merits of our Redeemer; and that we are intitled to his favour and acceptance.

It was necessary to guard the passage now before us with some such explanation to prevent mistakes,—and that men may not presume upon that false peace or security, which some may entertain, who, perhaps, never thoroughly examined their own hearts or consciences at all.

But, from the text thus explained, we may observe the following particulars.

1. That there is, in every man, a natural conscience, which (generally speaking) acquits him or condemns him, according to the tenour of his life and actions.

2. That, if our hearts or consciences condemn us, as having lived in any known or wilful

wilful course of sin, we have reason to believe that God, who knows a great deal more of us than we do of ourselves, doth likewise assuredly condemn us.

3. That, if, upon a serious examination of our hearts and lives, our own consciences acquit us,—we have reason to hope that God will likewise graciously acquit us, through the merits of Christ; and that we are intitled to his favour and forgiveness.

Let us consider these particulars in their order, and endeavour to make the right uses and improvement of them.

And, 1st, That there is, in every one, a natural conscience, which (generally speaking) acquits him or condemns him, according to the tenor of his life and actions.

This is here plainly supposed or implied:—*If our heart condemn us*, (says the Apostle;) and again, *If our heart condemn us not*;—plainly intimating, that there is something in us which condemns, or not condemns us, (that is, absolves and acquits us) namely, our own hearts and consciences.

And for the truth of this we may appeal to the common feeling and experience of mankind,—there being no one, I am persuaded, so wholly destitute of the common principles

of reason or religion, as to be altogether insensible of the power of conscience.

It is very observable, that there is implanted in mankind a natural abhorrence of some things and actions; so that men cannot bring themselves to do them without great reluctance, without much unwillingness and struggle with themselves;—And, after they have done them, they feel a secret horror and remorse, condemn themselves for what they have done, and wish it undone again, if possible.

And hence it is that few have engaged in a wicked course of life without feeling, at the first, some inward checks and rebukes, the secret reproaches and misgivings of their own heart.—It is true, that length of time and a resolute and obstinate perseverance in sin may tend to wear out those impressions, and to silence, by degrees, the voice of conscience.—It is in this as in most other cases:—A long use and custom will reconcile men to any thing almost:—But, however, it is seldom that men arrive to such a pitch of hardness in the ways of sin but that their consciences return upon them sometimes in the midst of their career, and put a damp to their pursuits and their false pleasures and enjoyments,—or, at least, it is sure

sure to pay them in the end with a double weight of woe and misery.—

The very Heathens were so sensible of this, that we find some of them in their writings giving us very lively descriptions of the terrors of a guilty conscience: * How, like so many furies, it haunts and torments the wicked man, and proves the executioner of vengeance on him (as it were) in the horrors of his own breast.

And agreeable to this is that observation of St. Paul, Rom, ii. 14, where, speaking of the Gentiles or Heathen world, he tells us,—that these, *having not the Law*, (i. e. having no written Law or Word of God) *are yet a Law unto themselves, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another*:—That is, God has endued them, and all mankind, with a natural conscience, that bears witness to the good or evil which they do, and accordingly accuses or excuses, acquits them or condemns them.

If it be objected against what we have been now contending for, that we see a great many wicked men who go on without check or

* See Juvenal, Sat. xiii,

controul in their sins, and, at the same time, none more gay or chearful, none more happy seemingly than they ;—which shews that the power of conscience is not so absolute or universal but that some men are intirely freed from the restraints of it.—To this it may be answered, in the first place, that we cannot always form a judgment of the inward peace of men's minds by outward shews and appearances ;—and that, for aught we know, the man, who appears so outwardly gay and happy, may yet be far from being easy and at peace within :—His own conscience may upbraid him, though he has the art to hide it from the world, and to conceal the inward tumults of his mind by an outside shew and affectation of ease and pleasure.

Or, supposing that a wicked man may be really free from those upbraidings of his conscience we are speaking of, yet it is not very difficult to assign a reason or two which may help us to account for it.

As, 1st, it is possible that men may be able so to palliate and excuse their errors to themselves as either not to see the guilt of them, or not in their just height and degree.

Or, 2^{dly}, it is possible (as we before observed) that men may pursue a wicked course
so

so long, and with so much obstinacy and resolution, as, in a great measure, to wear out the impression made upon them by their conscience, and to stifle its reflections. There are some such, we must confess, as the Holy Scriptures have described to us, who have their consciences seared with a hot iron—i. e. become hard, and dead, and insensible, through a long use and habit of sin.—These men (it is certain) have a natural conscience as well as others, and were, at first, no doubt, sufficiently sensible of its reproofs. But they have made a shift to overcome it by degrees; have, with great labour, gained a perfect mastery over this clamorous and restless enemy; have silenced its rebukes and accusations; and have arrived, at length, to a just pitch of hardness in their evil courses.

Thus is it that men may stupify their conscience for a while;—but then it commonly returns upon them in the end with greater force and fury:—And some severe affliction or calamity, the approach of sickness or of death, is generally known to awaken in the minds of men those terrors and rebukes of conscience which before seemed quite suppressed.

It is possible, indeed, that wicked men, in the time of health and prosperity, may be
able

able to free themselves, in a great measure, from the rebukes and checks of conscience ; —but they find it otherwise, when any evil overtakes them, or when the terrors of approaching death revive within their breast a sad remembrance of their sins, and fills them with dreadful expectations of a future Judgment :—It is then that the rebukes of an enraged conscience do commonly return upon the wretched sinner with greater force than ever, like fire that flames out with the greater violence, the more it was suppressed, and create within him a torment inexpressible.—Ask those who are about the beds of the sick to prepare them, in their last moments, for another life, and you will hear abundant instances of this nature.—Happy are those who take care in season to provide for their eternal state, that they may not feel the terrors of unpardoned guilt, at the hour of death.

If it be still objected, that there have been some men, after all, who, after a lewd and dissolute course of life, have died hard (as we use to say) and without appearing to have felt any great disturbance or uneasiness of conscience ;—I answer, supposing that there may have been some few examples of this kind, yet it is certain they are so very rare, that we
may

may justly look upon them as a sort of monsters in the moral world,—such as degenerate from the common standard (as it were of human nature, and are of a different make from the rest of mankind ;—and therefore it is certain that a few such exceptions as these (admitting that there may be such) can be of no force to destroy a general rule or observation.

So that, I presume, it sufficiently appears from what has been said, that there is in every man a natural conscience, which (generally speaking) either acquits him or condemns him, according to the tenor of his life and actions ; which was the first observation drawn from my text.

I cannot, however, pass on to my second head, without making some useful reflections from what has been said.

As, 1st, From hence we cannot but perceive and admire the goodness of God, who, to restrain men from the ways of sin, has endued them with a natural principle of conscience,—such as generally applauds them, when they do their duty ; accuses and condemns them, whensoever they transgress it. As this is the great restraint that usually keeps men within the bounds of their duty,

so it is a great argument of the goodness of Almighty God, that He is pleased in this manner to provide for our eternal happiness. —This shews Him really concerned for our salvation, since He has put into the hearts of men such a powerful monitor as this, to encourage and excite them to do well, and to rebuke, and threaten, and chastise them, when they do amiss: A monitor, to whose reproofs it is certain all are subject, unless they have wilfully stopped their ears, and refuse to hearken to its just and faithful admonitions. This (sure) if any thing, is a sufficient demonstration, that God hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner (as He himself declares) but would have all men turn from their transgressions, do their duty, and be saved.

Again, 2dly, From hence may be drawn a good argument in proof of a future Judgment: —For what is this judgment, which every man's conscience passes upon his own actions, but as a pledge or earnest of a future Judgment to be past upon mankind in another life?—Were it not for this, there could be no reason, either for that satisfaction which arises from a good conscience, or for the terrors of an evil one. If, then, these hopes and fears are natural to us, we have reason to con-

conclude, that the Author of our beings did not plant them there in vain,—but that they were intended to give us warning of a future Judgment and another state of life, where all shall receive their final recompence, either of reward or punishment, according to the things done in the body, whether they were good or evil.

And therefore, 3dly, Hence we plainly see the folly of endeavouring to shake off the painful reflections of a bad conscience, by a free indulgence to pleasure, by drink, or company, or any other of those arts and methods wicked men make use of to this purpose.

For, alas ! What can it avail them, though at present they were ever so dextrously able to silence the rebukes and clamours of their conscience, if it shall awake again hereafter to their greater horror and confusion, at the hour of death, or in the day of Judgment ?—Let no man deceive himself ; there can be no way to get absolutely rid of the terrors of an evil conscience, so as that they shall not one day return upon him, but by getting rid of his sins. If you desire to be at peace within yourselves, you must first be sure to make your peace with God ;—and this can no way

be done but by forsaking all your sins, and walking from henceforth in newness of life.

—This is the only proper remedy for the pains and tortures of a wounded conscience, the only certain ground of rest and happiness, both here and hereafter.

4thly, and last of all, From what has been said, we cannot but be sensible of the exceeding comfort and advantage of a good conscience;—for, unless all that we have been saying be to no purpose,—if there be any thing of truth in what we have observed of the inward motions of our own conscience, the satisfaction which it gives us when we do our duty, and the pain and anguish consequent upon sin (and for the truth of this we may appeal to the experience of mankind) then, certainly, there can be no greater blessing in the world than the testimony of a good conscience.

This, therefore, we should always study to preserve and cherish;—for this should we be content to sacrifice whatsoever else is dear or valuable to us;—herein should we continually exercise ourselves, with the great Apostle St. Paul, to have always *a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.*

In

In a word, then, and to conclude this discourse, let this be *our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world*, as knowing this to be the best and surest pledge of our eternal happiness. *If our heart condemn us not*, says St. John in my text, *then have we confidence towards God*:—If, upon a just and impartial examination of our past lives, we are conscious to ourselves that we have sincerely studied to discharge our duty both to God and man; that we have all along been engaged in a good life, or fully repented of a wicked one;—that we cherish no bosom-vice or sin, nor wilfully omit any known duty:—In a word, if, in the general course and conduct of our lives, we really make it our endeavour to serve and please God above all things,—then may we entertain a comfortable hope that God will likewise graciously acquit us, at the last day, through the merits of our Blessed Saviour, and crown us with eternal life and glory in the world to come.—

Which God of his infinite mercy, &c.

SECOND PART.

PROCEED we to the second observation, which was this :

That, if, upon a review of our past lives, our own conscience condemn us, we have reason to think that God, who knows a great deal more of us than we do of ourselves, will likewise assuredly condemn us: *If our heart condemn us, says the Apostle, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things, i. e.* the most secret sins of men, those that escape the eyes of all the world, and may slip out of their own knowledge and remembrance, are yet open to the eyes of God, who seeth all things, whose memory can never fail him, and who keeps a perfect and exact account of all our thoughts, words, and actions ;—and therefore, if our heart condemn us, what can we expect but that Almighty God should pass upon us the same sentence of condemnation?

This is so plain and obvious, in the general, that it needs no proof ;—and therefore all that will be necessary for me will be only to point out a few things to guard it from mistake.

As,

As, 1st, We are to observe, that the condemnation, here spoken of by the Apostle as passed upon us by our own hearts, cannot be meant with respect to those sins which men have heartily repented of and forsaken; for these, we have reason to hope, are graciously forgiven by Almighty God, and therefore our conscience has no longer any just cause to condemn us for them, in a strict and proper sense, as if we were still liable to the Divine displeasure. — The self-condemnation here meant (in a word) is not that of the true penitent, who, though he has abandoned every sinful course, and consequently is intitled to the favour and forgiveness of Almighty God, yet cannot but reflect upon his former sins with horror, and justly condemns himself for them; — but the self-condemnation here meant is that which arises from the conscience of a wicked life still followed and pursued. — When men's hearts tell them that they live in any known course of sin, and have not yet the will or resolution to forsake it; — that they have been guilty of any wilful or notorious breach of God's commandments, which they have not thoroughly atoned for by a hearty and sincere repentance: — In short, it is the condemnation which wicked men either do

pass, or have reason to pass, upon themselves, when they reflect upon their wicked lives, that is here meant by the Apostle, and which is the certain and infallible sign of a much more dreadful sentence of condemnation past upon them in heaven;—a sentence which they will never be able to reverse but by a timely reformation and amendment of their lives: If in this sense our heart condemn us, God, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things, will likewise most assuredly condemn us.

And now (methinks) I would fain recommend this thought a little to all those who knowingly and wilfully pursue a course of sin:—These (without all dispute) are such as stand condemned, and that very justly too, by their own hearts or consciences;—they may, indeed, find means to still their consciences in some measure, and to keep them from being very loud or very importunate in thus condemning them; but still, as long as they knowingly pursue a sinful course, it is plain that they are self-condemned.

And, now, what a sad thought must it be to such as these to reflect that the sentence of condemnation, which they thus pass upon themselves, is at the same time ratified in heaven;

heaven;—that, as sure as they know themselves to be wicked, so sure is it that God hath likewise set them down, in his unerring accounts, in the number of the wicked, and such as shall not inherit everlasting life.—How must it astonish and confound the sinner, could he but seriously reflect, that the sentence of his own breast, when built upon such clear and certain evidence as this, is, in effect, the sentence of Almighty God;—and, as sure as he cannot but know that he hath cut himself off from the number of the just here below, so sure is it that God hath blotted his name out of that book of life which is kept above;—and therefore, should he die and perish in this state of guilt, he must needs be miserable for ever?

This is unquestionably the case of all those who knowingly and wilfully pursue a course of sin, of what kind soever;—as sure as their own consciences condemn them, so sure is it that they stand condemned in the sight of a much greater Judge, and before a higher tribunal.—

But here it may not be amiss to consider the case of another sort of persons, who, tho' not conscious to themselves of having lived in any unrepented sin, are yet apt to entertain

very perplexing doubts and distrusts of their spiritual state.

This is the case of some good Christians, and such as have led innocent and pious lives, but, through the weakness of their understandings, or the timorousness of their natures, are often subject to melancholy fears and apprehensions, so as, sometimes without ground or reason, (and even though they know not why) to look upon themselves as reprobates, and almost despair of their salvation.—

But such as these would do well to consider, that these unreasonable and groundless fears are not so properly the judgment of their consciences as the effect of a disordered and a weak imagination. If, upon a serious examination of their own hearts, they cannot charge themselves with any unrepented sins ; —if they feel a real purpose and intention to do the will of God in all things, and make conscience of offending in the least particular ; —if they use their utmost endeavours to discharge their duty, and earnestly desire and pray for God's assistance to enable them to do it ; in a word, if they have a sincere love for God and men, and make it their business to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present life ; — here is a sufficient ground for hope and comfort

fort from this inward testimony of their conscience.—If, after all, they still entertain unreasonable doubts and fears, these (as I said) are not so properly the voice of conscience as the effect of a timorous spirit, or a weak and disordered imagination. Such a condition is, indeed, very much to be pitied, because it must needs be very uncomfortable.—But, however, we are not to think that this mistaken judgment such weak Christians pass upon themselves has any influence at all upon the certain and infallible judgment of Almighty God.—In this case, though their hearts condemn them, yet God, who is greater than their hearts, and knoweth all things, is able to correct the errors of their hearts and the mistakes of a weak imagination:—And it is certain that the truly pious and conscientious Christian will be always acceptable to God, how unacceptable soever they may be to themselves.—Their want of present peace or comfort is no argument of their being destitute of the Divine grace or favour:—Their doubts and fears, indeed, may make them miserable here; but they do not tend to destroy their title to happiness hereafter.

However, the best advice that can be given to such as these, I mean, if they are capable of

such advice, is to endeavour to conquer those mistaken fears and apprehensions by the help of reason and consideration :—To possess themselves with a firm and unshaken persuasion that God, who is infinitely good, will never fail nor forsake those who piously rely upon Him, and sincerely study to discharge their duty :—To commit their souls, therefore, to Him in well-doing, and, by constant and devout prayer and the diligent endeavours of a holy life, to labour more and more to assure their hearts before God, and to attain that peace of mind which is so very necessary to our happiness and comfort here in this life.

But, 3dly, There is yet another sort of persons whose case it may not be improper to consider, before we leave this head :—And that is the case of those who lead such mixed uncertain lives that it is a matter of some difficulty to themselves, as well as others, to determine whether they are in the number of good or bad Christians, whether they are in a state of grace and salvation or not.—These are such as sin and repent, and sin again, and so again renew their vows and resolutions of amendment,—and this in a perpetual round, (as it were) so that it is hard to say whether sin or religion

religion be the most prevailing principle in them.

Now such as these (it is certain) can have no just ground to hope well of their condition, till they have brought themselves to a more fixed and steady course of life;—till they have gained a more complete victory over their sinful lusts and passions, and can pursue their duty with some degree of constancy and perseverance:—*He that washeth himself after touching a dead body,* (says the wise son of Syrach) *if he touch it again, what availeth his washing?* So is it with the man that humbleth himself for his sins, and goeth and committeth them again; who will bear his prayer? Or what doth his humbling profit him? Ecclus, xxxiv. 26.

Nothing is more certain than that God requires a fixed and steady obedience to his laws as the condition of salvation:—And therefore we can have no assurance of our being in a state of grace or acceptance, till we have had some trial, and have given some proof of our obedience.—All the repentance in the world is to no purpose, unless it work a thorough reformation in us:—And this is commonly wrought in us by degrees, by care, and watchfulness, and the blessing of Divine grace
concurring

concurring with our own sincere and diligent endeavours.—If, after having made some progress in the reformation of their lives, men return again to the practice of their former sins, they cancel all that they have done, and their repentance is of no account or value in the sight of God.

So that whoever desires to entertain a reasonable and well-grounded hope of the Divine favour and acceptance must first of all (as I said) endeavour to bring himself to some degree of fixedness and regularity, of constancy and perseverance in a holy life. If men lead such mixed uncertain lives as that they scarce know which they follow most, whether sin or their duty;—their salvation (to say the best of it) must needs be likewise very hazardous and uncertain:—And therefore it concerns all such to bring their lives to a more fixed and steady rule and a better conformity to the will of God, if they would not run the greatest hazard in the world, even that of their salvation.

And I question not but this caution reaches a great number of Christians,—it being the fault of too many to lead such mixed uncertain lives, so fluctuating betwixt God and the world, betwixt religion and their sensual lusts,
betwixt

betwixt the pleasures of this life and the happiness of the next, that we need not wonder, if, upon a review of their past lives, they find their case to be exceeding doubtful, and know not what to think of their salvation. If such men's consciences do not absolutely condemn them, yet it is certain that they neither can nor ought in reason to acquit them:—And, therefore, they have always cause to fear the worst, and to look upon their condition as extremely hazardous, till, by a steady course of piety and virtue, they have gained a better title to the favour of Almighty God and the reward of everlasting life.—This and this alone is a secure foundation for peace and comfort, the only certain ground of a rational hope and assurance, of trust and confidence towards God.

Which brings me to the third and last observation drawn from my text, which was this:—

That, if, upon a serious and impartial examination of our lives, our own consciences acquit us,—I mean not, acquit us of all sin or imperfection, for that is impossible; but as having, for some time past, sincerely endeavoured to discharge our duty, without falling into any great or wilful and deliberate sins, or continuing

continuing in any known course or habit of sin, and as having lived up in some measure to those rules and precepts God hath set us ;—I say, if our consciences shall thus acquit us,—then may we hope that God will likewise graciously acquit us, and that we are intitled to his favour and forgiveness :—*Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, (says the Apostle) then have we confidence towards God.*

I have laid down this observation with so much care and caution, because it is certain there are a great many people in the world whose hearts do not condemn them, and who nevertheless are far from having any just grounds of hope or confidence towards God.—Such are all those profligate and wretched sinners who have made a shift to stifle the rebukes and accusations of their conscience, and will not suffer it to speak at all ;—These men, though their consciences do not condemn them, or at least do not appear to them to do so, are yet, without all dispute or question, under the just condemnation of Almighty God.—Again, it is very possible for men to cherish and indulge some bosom-vice or sin, which (for want of duly examining their own hearts, or comparing their lives with that which ought to be the rule and standard of them,

them, I mean the commands and precepts of the Gospel) may have intirely escaped their own notice and observation:—And yet these, though their consciences do not condemn them, I fear, will hardly be acquitted in the sight of God.—The reason is very plain, because it is every man's duty to consider and examine his own life as well as to acquaint himself with the will of God revealed to us in the Scriptures, and to see how his manners and behaviour square with this rule. If, through a wilful neglect of such examination, he chance to fall into any sin, and continue in the practice of it through ignorance and mistake; yet, as this ignorance was wilfully incurred, it is certain it can never be admitted as a just excuse for him in the sight of God.

The words of our Apostle in my text, then, ought undoubtedly to be understood with some caution and restriction, viz. with some such limitation as this:—That if, upon a full and impartial trial and examination of ourselves, our consciences shall find no reason to condemn us, then may we have confidence towards God.

The ground of this assurance, then, or confidence towards God, (which the Apostle speaks

speaks of) must be laid, if we proceed aright, in the careful examination of our hearts and lives,—that we may see whether we have lived up to the rules and precepts God hath set us in the Gospel, without going on in any wilful course of sin. And, as far as we can assure ourselves, upon a due examination, of our having lived up to these conditions, so far we have reason to entertain a well-grounded peace, and hope, and assurance towards God:—Whereas whatsoever is built upon other considerations than this can be only a rash and foolish hope, a false and dangerous security.—

It was the advice of St. Paul, *Let every man prove his own work*, i. e. let him try and examine his own life; and, if that be found to have been such as the Gospel rule requires, *Then* (says he) *shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another*, Gal. vi. 4. And the same Apostle, speaking of the hope and comfort which himself enjoyed, and every other good Christian, lays down this as the foundation of it:—*Our rejoicing in this*, (says he) *the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and Godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*—2 Cor. i. 12.

The sum of all is this:—That, if we desire to entertain any comfortable hopes of the fa-

vour of Almighty God and of our own salvation, we must utterly forsake the ways of sin, and apply ourselves with diligence to the discharging of our duty:—And the more exact and circumspect men are in the leading of a good life, the longer time they have been engaged therein, and the greater progress and advancement they have made in the ways of piety and virtue;—the more peace and comfort will they generally feel within them,—the more will their hopes of future happiness be established and enlarged,—and the more reason will they have for that confidence or assurance towards God which the Apostle justly reckons as the peculiar privilege of the good Christian.

If however there may be some good Christians who do not feel this peace of mind within them, but are troubled with doubts, and fears, and perplexities, concerning their spiritual estate;—either those fears proceed from some infirmity which they are conscious of, and which it is in their power to help, or it is not.—If it be in their power to help it, they know the remedy, and it is their duty to apply it: Let them endeavour to live with more exactness, and then, perhaps, they would soon experience more of spiritual hope and comfort.

comfort. But if their fears proceed from some infirmity that is unavoidable, and which they have done all that was in their power to remove, but cannot,—or, at least, are not able wholly and intirely to overcome it, as there are some lesser failings and infirmities that sometimes stick even to the best of Christians;—they may be sure the merciful and gracious God will not be so severe as to impute to them what was not in their power wholly to avoid,—at least not to impute it so as that it shall destroy their title to salvation. This perplexity and fear, then, this pensive doubt and distrust which sometimes lodges in the bosom of a good Christian, may be only the effect of a disordered mind, or of a timorous constitution:—This is certain, that, if we do our duty with sincerity and diligence, i. e. if we do the best that we are able, (and who is there that cannot do as much as that, if he please?) we have all the reason in the world to trust in the Divine mercy:—And, though we ought not to presume, or grow secure and confident, yet may we justly entertain a chearful hope of our everlasting salvation.

What remains, then, but only, in the last place, briefly to exhort you, in the words of the Apostle, to *add to your faith virtue, knowledge,*

ledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity;—and to abound still more and more in all the graces of a Christian life. So shall you enjoy that peace and confidence towards God, that hope and assurance of his favour, which is the only solid ground of happiness and comfort here in this life; and hereafter be admitted to the regions of the blessed, where they enjoy an everlasting peace and rest;—where there is fulness of joy, as the Scriptures tells us, and pleasures for evermore.—To which God of his infinite mercy bring us all, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord:—

To whom, &c.

Q

S E R-

S E R M O N XI.

Matt. v. 48.

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father
which is in heaven is perfect.*

OUR Blessed Saviour having, in the foregoing part of this chapter, set before his disciples some of the most excellent rules and precepts of an holy life, He at last directs them to an example still more perfect, if possible, than any rule or precept whatsoever, even that of God Himself,—whose goodness he would have them copy after and transcribe into their lives; to approve themselves his children by being as like him as it was possible, and to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect:

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father
which is in heaven is perfect.*

For the right improvement of which words it may be necessary for us to inquire,

1. What that perfection of God is which we are here required to imitate.

2. How

2. How far we are obliged to imitate it, or in what sense it is that we are commanded to be perfect, as God is perfect.

3. To consider the great advantages of setting before us such a pattern of perfection, and endeavouring to imitate it in the course and conduct of our lives.—

1st, then, Let us inquire what that perfection of God is which we are here required to imitate.

Now the perfections of God are twofold; some proper and peculiar to Him, and incommunicable to any creature; others of such a nature that we see some likeness or resemblance of them in other beings, and which are therefore called the communicable perfections of the Deity.

As for the first sort,—those perfections of God, which are proper and peculiar to Him, and incommunicable to any other, it is certain that we are not required to imitate Him in these;—we cannot do it, if we would;—such are his self-existence, independence, his almighty power, his being every-where present, knowing all things, and the like;—which, for any finite creature, much less a creature of so low a rank as man is, to presume to arrogate to himself, or think to imi-

tate God in, would be the greatest folly and presumption:—This seems, indeed, to have been the very sin of Lucifer, and that which cast him out of heaven, that *he affected to be like the Most High*, Isa. xiv. 14.—and it was that (we know) with which he tempted our first parents: *Ye shall be as Gods*, Gen. iii. 5.

The perfection of God, then, which we are to aspire after a likeness of, is not that absolute perfection of his nature, wherein he exists, after a peculiar manner, far above all heighth and conception, all approach or imitation;—but his moral perfection only;—I mean his righteousness, and truth, and goodness, and his other attributes of this kind,—wherein it is not only lawful for us, but our duty, to endeavour to be as like Him as we can;—and, the nearer we approach to Him herein, the more that we can shew of this Divine image in us, the more will it recommend us to his favour:—*For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*, (says the Psalmist) *his countenance doth behold the upright*, Ps. xi. 7.—

But still it may be asked, How is it possible for us, even with respect to these the moral and imitable perfections of the Deity, to approach any thing near to a likeness or resemblance

resemblance with God, much less to be perfect, as He is perfect? *He who chargeth his Angels with folly, and the heavens are not clean in his sight:—How much less man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm?* Job iv. 18. xv. 15. xxv. 6.

And this, therefore, leads me to the

Second inquiry, viz. How far we are obliged to imitate God in these his moral perfections, and to be perfect, as He is perfect.

Now God, being infinite in all his perfections, can no more be equalled by us in his goodness than greatness: And therefore,

1st, To be perfect, as He is perfect, does not (to be sure) imply an equality of goodness with God, or the same in measure and degree, but only a likeness or resemblance in kind;—such a measure and proportion of holiness as so frail and fallible a creature as man is capable of, and which, for the nature of it, is the same with that in God, though in degree there be no comparison.

For, 2dly, We may consider that things are perfect, when they are perfect in their kind:—A man is perfect (for instance) when he has attained to the perfection of a man, though he fall greatly short of the perfection of an Angel of light, and infinitely shorter

still of that of God ; yet is he perfect, howsoever, according to the measure and standard of human nature,—as perfect as a being of his size and rank in the world can be expected or required to be : And therefore, when he has attained to this perfection, which is all that he is capable of, he may justly be allowed to be perfect.

But, 3dly, Neither is the utmost perfection, which we are capable of as men, to be expected from us, or attainable by us here in this life ; but only such a measure and degree of it as is consistent with our present circumstances and the condition of a frail and mortal nature :—It is in the life to come that we expect to be made perfect or consummate in holiness as well as happiness,—and our very best attainments here below are but as a farther step and advance towards it ;—so that, in short, the perfection which belongs to us in our present state, and all that is required of us, consists in a continued progress or going on towards perfection ; the improving ourselves daily more and more in all those graces and virtues which we shall exercise hereafter, in a much more perfect manner, in the kingdom of heaven.

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And hence it is that we find mention of a twofold perfection in the Holy Scriptures; the one such as a good Christian may attain to here in this life; the other not to be attained or hoped for but in the life to come. The one consists in the sincere endeavours of an holy life, amidst that variety of temptations which surround us here in this world; and making a daily progress in the ways of virtue and goodness, though still not without some mixture of human frailty and infirmity; —the other consists in the perfect exercise of all virtues, when we are intirely freed from those infirmities, and placed above the reach of sin or temptation.

And, therefore, with respect to this last sort of perfection, we find the Apostle St. Paul freely confessing for himself, that he had not yet attained it, but was only in the road towards it, and was still labouring and endeavouring after it:—*Not as though I had already attained* (says he) *or were already perfect: But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*, Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14.—And yet the same Apostle acknowledges too, in

the very next words, that there was a sort of perfection which he had already attained, and was attainable in this life:—*Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded,*—ver. 15.

Our perfection here in this life, then, consists in *running the race that is set before us with all diligence and perseverance*;—not contenting ourselves with the practice of some duties to the neglect or transgression of others,—nor resting in any low attainments of virtue and goodness,—but still advancing onward, and labouring every day to become better;—correcting the errors of our past life by a more exact behaviour for the future, and striving to outdo ourselves in every thing that is virtuous and praise-worthy.—Thus it is that the Wise Man hath described to us the way of the just or righteous man, Prov. iv. 18. *The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

And how much it will contribute to our progress and advancement in goodness to set before us such a glorious pattern as that recommended in my text is what I propose to shew under my

3d and last head, Wherein I am to consider the advantages of setting God before us as our pattern and example, and endeavouring to imitate Him in the course and conduct of our lives.

Be ye therefore perfect, (says our Saviour) as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.—

And, now, the advantages of setting before us such a glorious pattern for our imitation are many and great:—

As, 1st, It will teach us that very necessary lesson of humility,—and keep us from having too high an opinion of ourselves, whatever attainments we may have made in virtue and goodness: For, when we see that, after all our best endeavours in the ways of piety, we still fall infinitely short of that glorious pattern which is set us for our imitation, how must this needs abate all fond conceit of ourselves and a presumptuous opinion of our own worthiness?—*Behold! even to the moon, and it shineth not; and the stars are not pure in his sight: How much less man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm?*

The foundation of spiritual pride is generally laid in the comparing ourselves with other people, and that, perhaps, some of the worst and greatest sinners:—*God, I thank thee*

thee (says the Pharisee, Luke xviii. 11.) *that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican:—But they* (as the Apostle tells us, 2 Cor. x. 12.) *who measure themselves by themselves, or compare themselves among themselves, are not wise.*—And the way to check this folly and presumption is to set aside all comparisons of this sort, and to measure ourselves by that perfect rule of duty set before us in Holy Scripture, and see how far our lives do square with this;—to look up to that most perfect pattern which is set us for our imitation, and consider how infinitely short we fall of being holy and perfect, as God is perfect and holy.—This would soon humble us in our own conceits, and teach us to make that just acknowledgement with holy Job: *Behold, O Lord, mine eyes have seen thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,* Job xlii. 6.

Again, 2dly, As the setting God before us for our pattern and example must needs teach us to be humble, so it will be a continual spur to our endeavours, and still put us upon doing better;—for this is but a necessary consequence of the other; and, as long as our apprehensions of God and ourselves are such

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as they ought to be, *i. e.* as long as we have just notions of the infinite holiness and perfection of God, and a lowly opinion of ourselves and our own attainments in virtue and goodness, we shall be always labouring to advance and to draw as near as possibly we can to a resemblance with that perfect Being, in a likeness to whom consists both our duty and our happiness.

But, 3dly, The setting God before us as our pattern carries in itself the highest motives and inducements to our imitation of Him :—
For,

1st, As He is our Maker and Creator, He stamped his image on our souls, made us in his own likeness at first, and communicated to us certain rays (as it were) of his own wisdom and goodness : For *God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.*—And, though this Divine likeness or image was sadly wasted and impaired by the fall, yet have we all the means and helps for recovering it again freely offered to us in our redemption.—To this likeness, then, should we be still aspiring, as the very end of our creation ;—after this should we be still endeavouring, as the great design of our redemption : It is this which, in the New Testament,

Testament, is so often called *the new man*, or new creature, *which, after God*, or after the likeness of God, *is created in righteousness and true holiness*,—Eph. iv. 24.

Again, as God is our Father, and we are often called, in Holy Scripture, his children, this relation contains another motive, and a very strong one, to our imitation of Him; for it is natural for children to endeavour to be like their parents, and, when the parents are good, it is certainly their duty so to do; and, whenever they degenerate, they do in some sort cancel the relation, and forfeit all pretensions to their favour. This, therefore, is frequently urged by our Blessed Saviour, as a persuasive argument to all manner of goodness: *That ye may be the children* (says he) *of your Father which is in heaven*, Matt. v. 45.—And so here in the text He exhorts them to be perfect, for this reason, because their *Father which is in heaven is perfect*.

Again, as God is the great Judge of all the world, who sees and observes every action of ours here, and shall most certainly reward or punish us for them hereafter, this is another very powerful reason to engage us to imitate Him, and endeavour to be perfect as He is perfect; for all our happiness depends upon
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his will and pleasure,—and his will and pleasure is determined by no other reasons or motives but these, that, if we take care to live up to the rules which He enjoins us, to obey the laws which He hath set before us, to be like Him in all holiness and goodness here, we shall most certainly be partakers of his happiness hereafter; if otherwise, we shall be banished from his presence to a place of misery and torment for ever. This consideration, therefore, lays the highest necessity and obligation upon us to imitate God in his goodness, and to endeavour to be as like that Being as we can, who is to judge us at the last day, and who has set himself no other rule for owning or disowning of us in the day of Judgment, than as we are either like or unlike to Him.

4thly, and it is the last consideration I shall offer to engage us to the due observance of that precept in my text, We may consider that, the greater perfection we attain to here in this life,—the more will be our happiness in the life to come.

For it is certain that the measures of our happiness and glory there shall answer to the measures and degrees of our improvement here.—If we take care to raise and to improve

improve our souls with the habits of piety and virtue, they are then prepared for happiness, and shall most certainly obtain it in the other life;—and the more, the more prepared they are, and the greater perfection they arrive at here in this.—On the other hand, if we deprave our natures rather than improve them, and sink our souls in vice, we sink them down in misery;—and the punishment, which we shall experience in the other life, will answer to the measures of our guilt and iniquity.

God is the only fixed and permanent Being in the universe, who, being infinitely perfect and unchangeable, can suffer no increase or diminution of his happiness;—all other beings are more or less happy, as they approach nearer to a likeness or resemblance with the Divine perfections:—The holy Angels, those bright inhabitants of heaven, who come the nearest to God in wisdom and goodness, are therefore next to Him in happiness;—mankind is in a middle state, as yet, a state of trial and probation; and he is sent into this world on purpose to improve himself in the habits of virtue and goodness, that he may be fit for the society of Saints and Angels hereafter.—The habits of vice or virtue, which
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men pursue and follow here in this life, do (as all agree) stick close to them still, and follow them into the next;—and fix their lot and portion there for ever, either with the Saints in light, or with the Spirits of darkness,—that is, the Devil and his Angels, who, by falling from that state of holiness wherein they were placed, are for ever banished from the face of God and from the happiness of heaven, and condemned to misery and torment. With these it is that every wicked and impure soul shall be associated in the life to come;—and how wretched must be such a state! how dreadful the society! If ever, therefore, we desire to be happy in the world to come, we must lay the foundation of it here in this world by divesting ourselves of every sinful habit whatsoever, and still endeavouring more and more to be just, and good, and merciful, and pure, and perfect; as God is perfect;—He will have no fellowship with an impure and wicked soul; for what communion hath light with darkness? But such as make it their endeavour to be like Him, and to copy after his Divine perfections, the nearer they approach to a resemblance of Him here, the nearer

nearer shall they be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of Him hereafter, in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.—

S E R-

S E R M O N XII.

1 Peter iv. 8.

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: For charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

THERE is no duty which our Blessed Lord himself more frequently or more earnestly inculcates in the Gospel, than that of love or charity:—And his Apostles, after him, were no less zealous in their exhortations to it, and their just praises and commendations of it.—St. Paul expressly prefers it to all other graces and virtues, even those excellent ones of Christian faith and hope:—(1 Cor. xiii. 13.) *Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*—And the Apostle St. Peter here, in the text, recommends it to us with a peculiar earnestness, and adds, moreover, the highest motive or encouragement to engage us to the practice of it:—*Above all things have fervent*

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charity among yourselves: For charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

It is my design, in the following discourse,

First of all, to explain the nature of that duty enjoined us in my text, *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves*:—And,

Secondly, To consider the motive or encouragement here given to it:—*For charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

I. To explain the nature of that duty enjoined us in my text, *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves*.—By charity, in the largest sense of the word, is meant the love of God and of our neighbour:—But, in a more restrained sense, and as it is oftener used in Holy Scripture and in common language, it signifies more especially the latter of the two:—And thus it seems restrained and limited in my text:—*Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves*, i. e. one towards another: Though we are to observe, that even charity, in this restrained sense, if it be true and genuine, supposes and implies the love of God.—It must be built on this as its foundation, and, when separated from it, can be of no value:—For, as we are to love God for his own sake, so we are to love our neighbour for God's sake, or in obedience to

that Divine authority which has commanded us to do so, and as a grateful return for all the mercies God bestows upon us, and the love he has expressed towards us :—So that there can be really no true love or charity for men, (not in a religious sense at least, and such as may be called a Christian virtue) where there is not first the love of God, as the root or principle of it, shed abroad in the heart. Men may be led, indeed, by mere compassion and good-nature, or by an inbred generosity, to exercise the outward acts of goodness to a very great degree :—And it must be owned, that even these are excellent stocks whereon to raise a truly Christian charity : They give a natural aptness to it, and make the practice of it much more easy.—But this is still rather a happiness of constitution than any real pitch of virtue,—till raised and consecrated (as it were) by that right turn and direction which a religious frame of mind is sure to give it by making God the center of our thoughts and actions, in whom they terminate, and to whom they must refer :—An habitual sense (at least) of our duty to God must be the foundation of our charity, and of every other duty towards men ; —neither can we have reason to expect or hope that God should reward us for any ac-

tions of ours but such as are done in obedience to his commands, for his sake, and to his glory.—

The love of God, then, (as I observed) must be the root or principle of our charity:—And this charity is nothing else but such a sincere kindness and good-will towards all mankind, whereby we are inclined to wish them well, and do them good. It is that benevolent temper and disposition of mind which rejoices in the happiness of others, and compassionates their sorrows, and consequently is ever ready to do the utmost in its power for the increasing of the one, and for the easing and removing of the other. And thus far (I mean with respect to the inward affection of charity) as it is plainly in every man's power alike, so is it equally required of every one as their duty.

But, then, as for the outward expressions of this charity, these must needs vary, according to men's different capacities, and the several opportunities that are put into their hands: But, in general, as we are always obliged to wish well unto all, so are we required, as we have opportunity, (and as far as our abilities will reach, and the rules of prudence and discretion

cretion will give us leave) to do good likewise unto all. Gal. vi. 10.

The object of our charity, according to the express rule of the Gospel, is all mankind without exception.—We are not allowed to narrow and restrain our affections as we please; to love one and hate another, just as our own humour leads; but bear a hearty good-will towards all.—And as our Blessed Saviour, the great pattern and example of our practice, as well as the author and finisher of our faith; as He died for all without exception, and none were excluded from a share of his love; so neither ought they to be from a share of ours:—Even our greatest enemies, and those that have injured us never so much, are not, for this reason, to become the objects of our hatred or ill-will;—but we must endeavour to conquer the first risings of resentment, and be so wholly free from all designs of malice or revenge, as, on the contrary, to be able sincerely and heartily to pray for them, and wish them well, and do them good. So says our Blessed Lord himself, in words as plain as possible:—*Ye have heard (says he) that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: But I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that*

curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

To attain this difficult pitch of virtue, we must endeavour to keep a watch over our thoughts, and to guard (if possible) the first swellings and motions of our minds ; not to suffer ourselves at any time to be too much ruffled by passion, or provoked to excess by ill usage :—Even in the justest cause of anger to remember we must still maintain our charity ;—and, though it may be sometimes necessary to punish, yet, more often, it is both safe and prudent, it is always great and generous, to forgive.

The duty of forgiveness of injuries, indeed, is laid down in the Gospel in very express and absolute terms, i. e. so far as it forbids us the wishing or endeavouring the hurt of those who have injured us, the rendering evil for evil, or doing any thing in the way of malice and revenge.—All this (no doubt) is very strictly and absolutely forbidden in the Gospel : But how far this precept of forgiveness will oblige us to recede from our just rights, to pass by injuries without demanding any reparation, and even to wave our own defence and vindication, is another question. To be sure, the law

law of Christian charity was never designed to exclude common prudence : And, therefore, though in some cases (and especially in smaller matters) this forbearance may be fit and necessary, in others good and laudable ; yet it would be against all the rules of reason and common sense to suppose it to be in all cases our indispensable duty. In short, there is a judgment of discretion which must guide us in such cases as these, where it is impossible to lay down any fixed or certain rule :—And in the forming such a judgment men should consult their reason, not their passions ; should put the case to be their own, according to that excellent rule of our Saviour ; and consider how themselves would think it reasonable to be dealt by :—Should lean towards the charitable side much rather than the other, it being much safer to forgive, even against the rules of prudence, than to exact a rigid satisfaction, and thereby transgress the rules of equity or justice. And, where there is indeed that fervent charity which the Apostle speaks of in my text, there will need no other monitor to excite and engage us to put on bowels of mercy, kindness, gentleness of mind, forbearing one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us.

Next to the forgiving of injuries the other branch of charity consists in doing all the good we can to others ;—in sincerely wishing and desiring their happiness and welfare, and doing all that lies in our power to promote it.—And the ways of doing this are many and various; and some or other of them are in every one's power, and therefore every body (to be sure) is obliged to it, according to that ability and opportunity he has for it.—This (it is certain) is the express injunction given us by St. Paul, as the rule or measure of our duty ; *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all.*—And who is there but may find daily opportunities of doing good in one way or another, if he applies himself in earnest to the doing of it ?—Either by relieving the necessities and wants of others, by visiting them in sickness, or comforting them under afflictions, or assisting them in their distress; by promoting peace and good agreement amongst neighbours ; by giving friendly counsel and advice, or a seasonable admonition or reproof ; by a good example, or by good instructions :—In short, by finding out some way or other to be helpful and beneficial to others, either with respect to their body or mind, their health or fortunes, their reputation or their souls. This last,

last, indeed, is the greatest kindness and benefit of all others :—And where there is that fervent charity recommended in my text, that true and real charity which is always founded in the love of God, there will never be wanting a becoming zeal and endeavour to promote the honour of Almighty God, and the advancement of religion amongst men.—

These, then, and such-like, are the proper fruits and effects of that charity recommended in my text :—And, where this is seated in the heart, the other will be sure to follow it in our practice and behaviour.

And now, to engage us the more willingly to the discharging of this great duty, let us now proceed, as we proposed, in the

Second place, to consider the motive or encouragement here given to it in my text :—

Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves : For charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

The most plain and natural meaning of the words is this :—That a large and fervent charity shall cover over many lesser failings and infirmities in the sight of God :—God will be so gracious to the truly charitable person as that he shall obtain the easier pardon and forgiveness, on the account of his charity.—If he be
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possessor of this virtue and perfection to a very eminent degree, it shall prevail for him at the throne of grace, and hide his other imperfections:—He shall the sooner find mercy at the hands of God for all the sins and errors of his life; and, though not without a true repentance, yet this nevertheless shall greatly contribute to make his repentance become the more effectual and availing:—*It shall cover a multitude of sins.* The phrase of covering of sins is used, in other places as well as this, for the pardon and remission of them:—*Blessed is he*, says the Psalmist, *whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered:*—Where the being covered and forgiven have plainly the same import and signification. Nay the very doctrine of my text is delivered by the Wise Man (Prov. xvi. 6.) in words less liable to misconstruction,—that *by mercy and truth iniquity is purged.* And it is very remarkable, that the same great privilege, which is here ascribed to charity in general, of covering or doing away of sin, is likewise affirmed concerning three of the most eminent branches of it in particular, in other places of Holy Scripture.—Thus of charity or mercy to the poor it is said, (Dan. iv. 27.) *Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor.*—The original,

original, as well as the ancient versions, have it, *Redeem thy sins by alms-deeds.*—

Thus likewise of forgiveness of injuries, which is another eminent branch of charity, our Blessed Lord himself pronounces, (Luke vi. 37.) *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*—And elsewhere, *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*—And thus, lastly, to excite us to be diligent in our endeavours to promote the good of men's souls, to reclaim them from sin or infidelity, and bring them to a happy sense of religion and their duty, which is the greatest charity of all other,—St. James hath used the very same encouragement, and the very same expression with that in my text: *Brethren, (says he) if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins; i. e. shall not only save his brother's soul, but shall hide a multitude of his own sins;—shall have them graciously pardoned and forgiven by Almighty God.*

So that we see there are some particular branches of charity to which this promise of pardon is annexed, in such a manner as will scarce allow of any other sense or construction.

—And,

—And, if this, then, be promised to some single branch of charity, we need not wonder if the same promise is made to the grace or virtue in general, which comprehends and takes in all its several branches;—nay, to a large and fervent charity, and such as is exalted in its degree, as well as wide in its extent:—And therefore we have reason to conclude, that, by the covering of sin, in my text, is meant the pardon and forgiveness of it.

But here let us not look on charity (or any other grace of ours, indeed) as the meritorious cause of our pardon, as if it were itself of worth sufficient to deserve it;—or that our good deeds can possibly compensate or make a real satisfaction (in the strict sense of the word) for our evil ones:—No, nothing but the precious blood of Christ himself, the only price of our redemption, can, in this sense, expiate or atone for sin; and, therefore, when the pleaders for merit and supererogation say, that a man may do some works so excellently good, as thereby to merit, in strict justice, the pardon of his sins and a reward at the hands of God; nay, and not only to merit for himself, but others too;—they talk in a language unbecoming the humility of a
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Christian, and are guilty of great folly and presumption.—It is *the blood of Christ* (the Holy Scriptures will tell us) that *cleanseth us from all sin*;—and we must not be so vain as to imagine that any graces or virtues of ours can have so much real worth in them, as to obtain the pardon of our sins by way of price or satisfaction; for, when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants;—we do no more than is our duty, even in the best things that we do;—and therefore our very best works can pass but for themselves (nay, and not that neither, considering how imperfect they are without a merciful allowance;) and it is impossible they should cover our defects by any proper virtue of their own;—no, it is the merit and sufferings of our Blessed Saviour for us that alone are able to do this:—But then, as Christ hath purchased for us the pardon of our sins, so we are to remember that he will bestow it upon his own terms and conditions;—and, amongst these conditions of our pardon, a fervent charity is none of the least considerable, or least prevailing;—nay, such large and ample promises are no-where made, in Holy Scripture, to any other Christian grace or virtue as to this: And, therefore, though we must not think that it can merit or deserve

serve forgiveness at God's hand, yet, through the mercy of Almighty God, and through the merits of our Blessed Saviour, it shall qualify men better than any other grace or disposition whatsoever to obtain it.

To make an use or two of what has been said. And, first, by way of caution, I may observe we are not to trust to or depend upon any single act of charity, much less the mere outward act, as if it were sufficient to procure a pardon of our sins, how great or many soever;—nor should we encourage ourselves in any wicked course, with a vain presumption of being able to save all at last by our charity;—for the promise of covering of sins is here made, not to any single act of charity, but to the grace or habit in general;—and not to any ordinary degrees of it neither, but to a fervent charity:—No, nor will even the most fervent charity (were it possible for him to be possessed of it) prevail for the pardon of one who lives in any known and wilful course of sin;—but only for sins of infirmity and surprize, the undesigned failings and errors to which the good Christian may be liable, such (in a word) as are consistent with a state of fervent charity;—for he can never be said to have charity in a true sense, as it implies

implies the love of God and his neighbour, who goes on in any wilful course of sin and disobedience towards God.—And, therefore, for a man to indulge himself in the practice of any vice, and hope to make amends for it by bestowing now and then some charities to the poor; or to flatter himself that he shall be able to cancel all his sins at once by opening his hand more largely and bountifully at his death; is a very dangerous and unhappy delusion.—Great, indeed, is the power of charity, and highly acceptable to God (no doubt) is every instance of bounty and mercy to the poor;—but, let us not deceive ourselves, it is not any single act of charity, no, nor a thousand acts repeated, that can atone for a bad course pursued and unrepented of; nothing less than an uniform and steady course of piety and virtue must carry a man to heaven. The best that can be said for those good deeds (if we may call them so) of men otherwise bad in their lives is, that they shall, probably, procure them a more favourable sentence, and mitigate their punishment in the life to come;—but this is all they must expect or hope for from them: The Gospel is very clear and express, that *without holiness no man shall see God*. No man must expect

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to be made happy, in the life to come, who lives in the practice of any vice whatever, who cherishes any bosom-fin, and has not the heart or resolution to forsake it.—There must be a time, in every man's life, when he must take upon him in good earnest to fulfil his duty, and, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, must give himself up to the service of God, and walk in all the ways of his commandments:—And, to such as are thus really engaged in the ways of piety and virtue, who walk before God with a perfect heart (as the Scriptures speak) and entertain no evil lust in opposition to Him, their errors and failings shall be graciously overlooked, and their charity, nay, and every instance of it, shall be considered and rewarded in the day of Judgment:—But we shall find ourselves most sadly mistaken, if we think to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of heaven, upon any terms whatsoever.—St. Paul lays it down as a possible supposition, that a man may bestow all his goods to feed the poor, nay, and give his body to be burnt in the cause of religion, and yet have no true charity:—And it is certain that he, who indulges himself in the practice of any vice, cannot possibly be said to have that charity which the Gospel rule requires;—and there-

therefore that appearance of it which he may boast of (how fair or specious soever) will never be admitted as a cover for the multitude of sins.

2dly, therefore,—We see what is the only proper use we ought to make of the doctrine now before us.—If we have applied ourselves, indeed, to the ways of piety and virtue; if we have taken upon us seriously, and in good earnest, a religious course of life, and, without exception or reserve for any favourite vice or evil practice, make it our sincere endeavour to serve God to the utmost of our power;—here is the greatest comfort and encouragement possible, with respect to the many slips and failings in his duty, to which even the good Christian, after all his best endeavours, will still be liable:—For, as his charity and love to others is sincere and fervent, so will God be ready to extend his love to him;—as his business and delight is to be merciful, so shall his reward be to obtain mercy:—The kindness, the favour, the forgiveness, he has shewn to others, shall be returned again upon himself in the most full and ample manner, *good measure, pressed down, and running over.*

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A fervent charity will not fail to inspire the good Christian with an earnest zeal and endeavour to do some things excellent, to do all things well;—and, where there is an honest endeavour to do all things well, God (to be sure) will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss:—And, as this, therefore, will afford matter of hope and comfort to the advanced Christian, so may it be of good use and instruction to the sincere penitent, and such as are but newly entered on a religious course of life;—such as these (it is certain) who, through the grace of God, are but just recovered from a wicked course, and delivered from the jaws of death and hell, are obliged more especially to love much (it is our Saviour's rule) because much hath been forgiven them;—they, of all others, should abound in charity, and in every good work, both to redeem the time which they have spent in sin and folly, and to shew their gratitude to God who hath reclaimed them from it;—and the more that they excel in love to God and to their neighbour;—the more zealously they endeavour to express it in their duty to the one, and doing good to the other; so much the more reason will they have to believe and hope, that their sins, though many,

many, are forgiven them:—*I say unto thee,* (says our Saviour of that penitent woman in the Gospel, when she had given the greatest signs both of her charity and her repentance) *I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much,* Luke vii. 47.

In a word, charity (if rightly understood) as it contains the sum of our duty here, so will it be the chief ingredient of our happiness in the life to come:—When all things else forsake us, this alone will still stand by us, and follow us into heaven, and become the source of our felicity, even there;—for the happiness of the saints above consists chiefly in loving God and being beloved by Him, and in that everlasting friendship and society which they maintain with one another, united by the strictest bonds of charity and love.

Now to God, &c.

S E R M O N XIII.

Of Judging our Neighbour.

James iv. 12.

*There is one Law-giver, who is able to save,
and to destroy: Who art thou that judgest
another?*

THERE is hardly any sin more common in the world than that of rash judging and censuring the conduct or behaviour of one another: As the Holy Scriptures, therefore, were given us for a rule of life to teach us to correct every vice and every folly, we find there some remarkable cautions against this evil practice in particular.

Our Lord himself forbids it in the Gospels, and that with a threatening annexed, which, severe and awful as it is, carries its own equity along with it: *Judge not, that ye be not judged: Condemn not, that ye be not condemned: For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged;*

judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. As if he had said, You that are now so rash and so severe in your judgments and censures of other people, what favour can you reasonably expect for yourselves in the future general Judgment? Is it not just and equitable that, as you deal with others, so you should be dealt by? That, with what measure ye mete, it should be measured to you again? And will not your own practice, then, if it be made the rule of Judgment, be sufficient to condemn you at the last great day?—

Somewhat like to this is the caution given us by St. James in the words of my text, *There is one Law-giver, who is able to save, and to destroy: Who art thou that judgest another?*

There is one Law-giver,—meaning God, the Law-giver and Judge of all; to whom we must every one of us give account of our behaviour at the day of Judgment. To Him, therefore, let us endeavour to approve ourselves; to Him let us leave the prerogative to judge of others:—To their own Master they must stand or fall: But *who art thou that judgest another?*

From the words thus briefly explained, I shall lay down the two following heads of discourse:

1st, To inquire with what limitations we are to understand the prohibition in my text, or what that judging is which is here forbidden. And,

2dly, To consider the reasons here offered by the Apostle to dissuade us from it, *There is one Law-giver, who is able to save, and to destroy.*—And again, *Who art thou that judgest another?*

First, then, let us inquire with what limitations we are to understand this prohibition in my text, or what that judging is which is here forbidden:

For it is plain that it cannot be understood in an absolute sense, as if all judging were forbidden; but only in certain cases, and with some restrictions.

As, first, we must not so understand these words as if they interfered with the Magistrate's office, or forbid those in authority to judge and punish crimes. This is so far from being forbidden, that it is every-where allowed, approved, and authorised in Holy Scripture. It is with respect to these that St. Paul tells us, *There is no power but of God;*
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the powers that be are ordained of God: Meaning, that, as God has all power and authority in himself, so, for the good of mankind, he hath committed a certain branch of that authority to Governors or Rulers here on earth: *They are his Ministers* (as the Apostle adds) *attending continually upon this very thing.—They are sent by Him* (as another Apostle speaks) *for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.* So that the office of the Magistrate or Judge, taken in that light in which the Holy Scriptures represent it to us, is no other than a certain delegated branch (as it were) of God's universal government; one of the methods of that wise and gracious Providence by which He promotes the peace and order of the world.

It is plain, then, that the judging here forbidden does not at all relate to the Magistrate's office, and can be only meant of that liberty which private Christians take to judge and censure the conduct of one another.

And this appears plain from the verse that goes before my text, where it is joined with the vice of evil-speaking: *Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law.*—Where

to speak evil of our brother, and to judge our brother, are put the one to explain the other; and shews that the judging here meant is that by which we censure and condemn our brother in our thoughts, which, if uttered by the tongue, is called evil-speaking.

But still it may be asked, Is all judging or censuring, then, forbidden to Christians? Or how far may we be allowed to judge and speak concerning the faults of other people?

To this I answer, briefly, as far as truth and charity will give us leave, and no farther.

Where a man's faults, indeed, are public and notorious, there every man may be allowed to pass a judgment on them, nay, and to express his detestation of the thing, if it be really detestable, as long as he bears no malice or hatred to the person.

We are not allowed to call evil good, or good evil, but must give every thing its proper name: And public infamy or shame is but the just reward of bold and open wickedness. There is but little regard due to the character or reputation of men who shew no regard to it themselves; and, therefore, they who are openly profligate must needs expect that the world should think of them as they deserve, nay, and speak of them too, if they speak

ſpeak of them at all, in terms that are no way advantageous to them.

But then this is only to be allowed (as I ſaid) where the thing is public and notorious : For it is not every idle rumour, every ignorant or malicious whiſper, that will bear a man out in preſently cenſuring and condemning of his neighbour ; much leſs in ſpreading ill reports concerning him, or ſaying what may tend to leſſen or defame him. A man's general character ſhould always be conſidered, in the firſt place, before we lightly entertain an ill opinion of him ; and, moreover, the fact well proved, before we take upon us to pronounce, or even to think him guilty. But, where a man's faults are evident to all the world, there every man may be allowed to expreſs his diſlike ; and happy were it if the public cenſure might bring him to himſelf at laſt, and reclaim him from his evil courſes. If this ſhould happen, indeed, and a perſon who has been openly bad ſhould nevertheless repent ſincerely, and become a new man, here the law of charity will oblige us to regard him in a different light,—to forget his former faults, if poſſible, or at leaſt never to mention them by way of reproach.—A true penitent will have grief and ſhame enough in the reflections of
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his own mind, which need not therefore to be aggravated by the bitter censures and remembrances of others.—God himself hath told us, by the Prophet Ezekiel, *That, if the wicked man turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right*, none of all his sins which he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him;—they shall be as clearly forgiven, that is, and blotted out, as if they had never been;—And what the Divine mercy hath thus cancelled and done away ought not surely to be revived and perpetuated in the memory or ill-natured speeches of men.

They, therefore, who can think themselves at liberty to upbraid their neighbour with any one great fault he may have been guilty of in his life, which nevertheless he hath sincerely repented of and forsaken; or claim a privilege of throwing the stain and reproach of it upon his innocent children and posterity, which is still more cruel and unjust, (and which, yet, is too common a practice with the lower unbred tribe, in their little quarrels and railings at each other:) Such as these are certainly guilty of that unwarrantable judging or censuring their brother, which the Apostle has condemned in my text.

But,

But, further yet, I must observe, that the words of the Apostle are not to be understood in that strict sense as if they forbid us to speak of the faults of others to themselves, by way of charitable admonition or reproof.—This we may be sure is not the judging or censuring condemned in my text, because the Holy Scriptures, in other places, expressly injoin it as a duty from one friend or neighbour to another:—Thus (Lev. xix. 17.) God was pleased to lay it as an express command upon the people of Israel, *Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.*—Where we see the suffering their neighbour to go on in sin, without endeavouring to reclaim him by a friendly admonition or rebuke, is reckoned by God as a mark of hatred towards him.—And it is, indeed, such in reality, or in its bad consequence and effect,—there being no greater evil for our greatest enemy to wish to us than that we be suffered to go on in sin without check or controul.

Let no one, therefore, be afraid to exercise this highly charitable office to their brother's soul, for fear they should be thought guilty of rash judging and censuring his behaviour;—a friendly admonition or reproof is not that
vice

vice forbidden in my text, but, if managed with discretion, may be the instrument of much good;—and it would be well for mankind if it were much more put in practice than it is, and that we had all of us learned this very useful lesson how to give and how to bear a charitable reproof:—For that observation of the Wise Man will be found, in most cases, to hold good,—that *better is open rebuke than secret (or silent) love*,—Prov. xxvii. 5.

In general, then, where any good end may be served by it, which it is our duty to promote, there we may be allowed to judge and speak of our neighbour's faults, and that not only to themselves, but others; so we do it with tenderness and caution, and a strict regard to truth and justice; not taking a pleasure in the doing of it, but submitting merely to the reason and necessity of the thing:—And therefore,

3dly, and to give a plain answer to our present inquiry, The judging, here forbidden by the Apostle, is all false, and rash, and needless, and uncharitable, judging or censuring the characters and conduct of other people.—

You must beware, in the first place, that your censures be not false or groundless:—

For,

For, whenever this happens, you are guilty of injustice to your neighbour, though you should only harbour such an ill opinion of him in your own thoughts; but much more if you give vent to it, and help to propagate the slander amongst others.—

But, 2dly, and that you may the better avoid false judgments, You should beware of being rash and precipitate in judging:—For there are so many things that are apt to deceive and mislead us, that, if we proceed hastily in this matter, it is ten to one but we make a wrong and a mistaken judgment. It was a wise rule, therefore, that is given in Ecclus. xi. 7. *Blame not, before thou hast examined the truth; understand first, and then rebuke*:—The Alexandrian copy reads,—Πρὶν ἢ ἐξέτασθαι, μὴ μέμψῃ δι' ἀκοῆς: *Blame not by rumour, before thou hast examined the truth*.—

In the 3d place, As you are to avoid all rash judgments, so must you likewise all needless ones;—all that censuring and judging our brother which there is no occasion for.—We are not allowed to make the faults of others our diversion, or to think ourselves at liberty to judge and speak with the utmost freedom of the behaviour of our neighbours, because, perhaps, we are idle and have nothing

thing to do:—Like those weak and inconsiderate talkers, who make no scruple to destroy a reputation, purely for the sake of holding a discourse.

Lastly, You must beware of all uncharitable judgments and censures of others:—You must be ready to put the best constructions that you can upon the words and actions of other people,—avoiding that too common, but ill-natured, practice of turning things to the worst sense, and suspecting ill of every thing that has but the least doubtful aspect. It is a received rule or maxim, in the courts of justice, that, in doubtful cases, the accused person should always be acquitted: And, if this be the rule of public judgments, much more ought it to be a rule to every private Christian, where any thing appears doubtful, that may affect the reputation of his neighbour.—A truly Christian charity (as St. Paul describes it to us, 1 Cor. xiii.) *thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things*; —i. e. it is ever ready to put the best construction upon words and things that they will bear, is willing to believe and hope the best of every one.

And, therefore, whatever judgment it may pass upon the outward actions of men, where the

the thing is evident and clear; yet it will be-
ware of judging of the intentions of the heart,
which can be known with certainty to God
alone, the great searcher and discernor of
hearts.

There is another thing which men ought
carefully to avoid, in their judgments and
censures of other people;—not to intrench
upon the prerogative of God by pretending
to discern men's hearts, or the secret springs
upon which they act, and which can be
known only to God and their own consciences,
any further than as their words and actions
plainly speak them.—And, as it is very possi-
ble for men's intentions to be good, at the
same time that there may be something in
their actions that appears otherwise, a truly
charitable disposition will, in such a case, be
ready to make fair allowances,—and be wil-
ling rather to impute it to a want of judge-
ment or discretion, or to an error of the un-
derstanding, rather than to any bad design or
purpose. In a word, let us but endeavour to
attain to that degree of charity, which our
Blessed Saviour, in his Gospel, hath made
the duty of every Christian, to love our
neighbour as ourselves, and to do to all men
as we would be done unto; and then we
shall

shall have, within our own bosoms, the best casuist in the world to direct us in this, as well as every other branch of that duty which we owe our neighbour.—

And thus I have gone through my first general head, and have endeavoured to shew you with what limitations we are to understand the prohibition in my text, or what that judging is which is here forbidden.

And, upon the whole, we may observe, that the precepts of Holy Scripture, relating to this matter, were not intended absolutely to forbid us to judge at all, but to make us cautious how we judge concerning the characters and conduct of other people;—that we are to judge with equity and truth, without suffering our passions or prejudices to interpose, and with a leaning rather to the favourable side, as those that wish well to their neighbour will be ever ready to believe and hope the best concerning him;—that we are to avoid all rash, and needless, and uncharitable judging of our brother;—must beware how we condemn him upon insufficient grounds;—how we take upon us the prerogative of God to know the secrets of his heart, or presume to judge of his intentions any farther than his actions plainly speak them.

them.—In a word, we should consider that the actions and characters of men are, for the most part, of such a mixed nature; depend, as to their goodness or badness, upon so many little circumstances, which escape the nicest observation of others, as being concealed within a man's own breast; that it is difficult to pronounce with certainty concerning them; and, perhaps, the real characters of men and things will never be perfectly known till the last great day of Judgment: Then is it that the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and there is nothing so concealed which shall not be made known:—To this great and general Judgment is it, therefore, that the Holy Scriptures, and particularly our Apostle in my text, remits Christians, and wisely exhorts them to suspend their hard censures of one another till that day.

And with this excellent advice of the Apostle I shall conclude my present discourse:

Rom. xiv. 10.—*But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the Judgment-seat of Christ.*

For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

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So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.

Let us not therefore judge one another any more.—

SECOND

S E C O N D P A R T.

I Come now to the second thing proposed, which is to consider the reasons here used by the Apostle to dissuade us from this sin of rash judging and censuring:—*For there is one Law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy*:—And again, *Who art thou that judgest another?*—

In which words there are two things, which, if duly considered, will make us cautious how we judge our brethren.

1st, Because we must all of us give account of ourselves to God, the *one Law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy*.

And, 2dly, Because we are, for the most part, very unfit and improper judges of the characters and conduct of one another:—*Who art thou that judgest another?*

And, 1st, then, We should be cautious how we judge our brethren, because we must all of us give account of ourselves to God, that great *Law-giver, who is alone able to save and to destroy*.

God himself hath appointed a day wherein He will judge the world in righteousness;—and why, then, should we take upon us to pre-

judge, or vainly hope to know things before their proper season? This is the inference which St. Paul himself makes from the foregoing consideration :—*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man have praise of God,* 1 Cor. iv. 5.

The great Judge of heaven and earth, who sees men's actions in their very birth, and is perfectly acquainted with even the smallest circumstance of them, yet does not ordinarily judge men so as to reward or punish them in this life, but has reserved the great decision to the future general Judgment ;—and shall we, then, weak, and ignorant, and short-sighted creatures, presume, without necessity, to judge and sentence one another? To prevent the great and infallible Judge, and hastily to pronounce upon the characters and conduct of men, before the time which God himself hath fixed to bring these hidden things to light?

Again, since we must all of us give account to God, the great Law-giver and Judge, we should consider that our proper business is to look well into ourselves, and to examine diligently

gently our own conduct, that so we may be able to stand the trial of that great day:— This is our great concern, and, if we do this with diligence and impartiality, we shall neither have the heart nor leisure to inquire much into the bad conduct and failings of other people.

Were any of us to stand a trial for our lives in the courts of justice amongst men, should we have the idle curiosity to inquire how other men behaved, and not rather look to ourselves, and endeavour to prepare what might be necessary to our own defence or justification in that day of trial? And what then can equal the folly of those who know there is a Judgment to be expected, where they must stand their trial either for life or death eternal; and yet are careless of their own lives, but curious observers of the lives of others? Certainly our curiosity and our attention ought to be placed upon that which is of most concern to us,—and where all the pains we can bestow will be no more than necessary.—

Instead of judging and censuring one another, therefore, let us every one resolve to judge ourselves (as St. Paul exhorts) and to be careful and conscientious in the discharging of

our own duty, that so we may not be condemned in the future Judgment.

I shall observe one thing more,—viz. That, as the consideration of a future Judgment should make us cautious how we judge and censure others, so will it afford just ground of comfort and support to those who labour under the weight of an undeserved reproach.—

There is scarce any thing, indeed, that wounds deeper, or which a generous mind is less able to bear, than shame and reproach: But, however, if this be his misfortune only, not his fault; and if his own conscience shall acquit him; it ought to be a support and a satisfaction to him to consider that his innocence shall be made appear in the day of Judgment.

And this, no doubt, is one reason of that strict scrutiny which will then be made into the lives and actions of men, when (as we are told in Holy Scripture) the secrets of all hearts shall be discovered, and there is nothing so concealed or hidden that shall not be made known, that so all men may be seen at last in their true and proper characters,—and it may appear to all the world (what is so hard to be distinguished now) who were the truly good and deserved praise, and who were otherwise,
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and intitled to infamy and shame :—For this (we learn) shall make a part of that eternal recompence which shall be distributed at the general resurrection, when (as the Prophet tells us, Dan. xii. 2.) *some shall awake to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt* : And so St. Paul, that *then shall every one* (i. e. every upright and sincere Christian) *have praise of God* : And how little are the praises or dispraise of men to be regarded in comparison of this ?—It was this consideration which sustained St. Paul himself under the mistaken and unjust censures of others :—*With me, says he, it is a small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment ; but He that judgeth me is the Lord.*

And thus much for the first argument used by the Apostle to dissuade us from rash judging, that *there is one Law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy.*

The other argument is this, that we are, for the most part, very unfit and improper judges of the characters and conduct of one another ;—*Who art thou that judgest another ?*—Whereby the Apostle would intimate to us, either that we have no authority so to do, or else that we are very unfit and unqualified for the office.

And, indeed, it may be justly questioned by what authority we set ourselves up as judges of the conduct of other people. The office of a Judge (we know) is what no man takes upon himself without a commission from his superiors, or else by a reference from the parties themselves who submit to be judged by him; and, if we do it without one or other of these to warrant us, we intrude into an office to which we have no right.—

Unless our duty, therefore, or some evident reason, call us to it, we can have no authority to criticise the conduct of our neighbour; to sit as judges over him, and bring his actions to the trial; to examine, censure, and condemn him:—*Who art thou* (says St. Paul, Rom. xiv. 4.) *that judgest the servant of another? To his own master he must stand or fall.*—As God, therefore, is the great master of us all, to Him it is that we are to render an account of our behaviour, and by his Judgment we must stand or fall. Such needless and unwarrantable judging of our brother, therefore, is (according to the reasoning of the Apostle) usurping a power which belongs to God alone, and those whom He is pleased to invest with it.

And,

And, if our authority to judge our brother may be justly questioned, it is certain that our ability for it, in many cases, is as justly questionable; and, perhaps, there is scarcely any thing wherein we are more liable to error and mistake.

If we judge from the reports of others, how often is it that prejudice, malice, or envy, or ill-nature, or sometimes, perhaps, a mere mistake and oversight, has had the greatest share in kindling these reports? And, if we judge from these, therefore, we are in great danger of being deceived and misled.

It is so common a thing for men's characters to be mistaken in the idle rumours of the world, that the very same person shall be railed at and reviled by some, and by others as highly commended as a man of virtue and integrity,—and, most probably, may be such, since the generality are but too much inclined to err on the censorious side.—

If we set aside the reports of others, and trust to our own sagacity in judging; yet here too we shall be liable to great mistakes, unless we proceed with care and circumspection.—
And that,—

First, on account of the difficulty that there is to see into the true characters of men
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and things; and next, with respect to ourselves, and the many prejudices we labour under, which are apt to bias and corrupt our judgment.

And, first, It is very difficult to see into the true characters of men and things,—and that for this plain reason, because we can see no further than the outside and appearance of them:—It is God alone that can discern the heart; and yet it is upon the inward temper of the heart that the qualities of actions greatly depend.—

For, though a good intention will not sanctify a bad action, yet will it take off somewhat of its guilt however, and hinder it from being as bad as otherwise it might and would have been:—And many things proceed from a mistake of the judgment, or mere heedlessness and inadvertency, and are, in this view, pardonable; which, if done with malice and design, might be justly looked upon as gross enormities;—So that, as it is difficult to discover the inward temper of men's hearts, which, in a great measure, stamps the value on their actions, we are, in this respect, very incompetent judges of their real merit or demerit.

And

And so we are likewise, in respect of ourselves, and the many prejudices we labour under, which are apt to bias and corrupt our judgment.—

A friendship for one man shall make us blind to all his faults; and some little difference with another shall give us a disgust, perhaps, even of his virtues. In general, men are more inclined to judge by humour and affection than by any fixed and stated rules:—And hence it is that the most trifling things are sometimes apt to possess them with an ill opinion of a person.

The very make of a man's face, that has had something in it disagreeable to the humour of another, has oftentimes possessed him with such a prejudice against him, at first sight, as nothing hath been able to remove, till a better acquaintance has at length convinced him of his folly, that he was too rash and precipitate in his judgment:—And so, likewise, a mere absurdity of behaviour, or some little weakness and indiscretion, shall, by hasty and severe judges, be interpreted as something highly criminal, and oftentimes throw a blot upon a character which it no way deserved:—So easy is it for us to be mistaken in our judgment and opinions of other people.

But

But the greatest prejudice of all, and that which will infallibly corrupt men's judgments in this, as well as other cases, is that of a depraved and wicked heart :—For he that is a slave to any vice himself is a very improper person to judge of the characters and conduct of other men.

The reason is this, because he will be apt to judge of others by what he finds and feels within himself :—And, as his own inclination to his favourite vice is strong, he will suspect the same of all men, and so proceed to censure and condemn without reserve.

And this is so evident to observation and experience, that a very little acquaintance with the world will serve to convince us of the truth of it. Thus a knave, for example, is but too apt to think the world a scene of knavery, and that there is scarcely an honest man to be found in it :—And thus the lewd and the debauched are but too apt to believe, or to suspect, that others are as weak or wicked as themselves :—And thus it is, whatever vice men have suffered to get the mastery over them,—like the jaundice, it gives such a tincture to the eye, that, be the object never so fair which they look at, it always appears to them in their own bad colours.

And

And therefore we need not be surpris'd if it has been sometimes the declared opinion of rakes and libertines, that there is no such thing as a truly good man in the world:—That all religion is hypocrisy, and all pretence to virtue but disguise:—That, whatever difference there may seem to be in the outward carriage of men, yet all men at the bottom are alike:—That those that appear bad are so in reality; and those that appear good are only so in appearance.

I say these, and the like, have been the rash censures pass'd by some, who, at the same time, have looked upon themselves as persons of extraordinary reach and sagacity, men of uncommon wit and talents, and very shrewd observers of mankind.—

But surely the persons who fall into this way of thinking have not well considered how unluckily it rebounds upon themselves: For, whatever the world may be, it is impossible that they should think thus, if they found but the least spark of goodness in their own breasts. —A very small propensity to virtue or religion would easily incline them to believe, or hope, that there was the same propensity in others,—nay, a much greater, they might well suppose,
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in some, if they had learned to think with any share of modesty or ingenuity.—

Such general reflections on mankind, therefore, as they shew a strangely profligate and abandoned spirit, so they may lead us justly to conclude, that all lesser degrees of vice or wickedness will, in proportion, bias and corrupt men's judgments in the censures which they pass on others.—In the general, those, who have forfeited their own reputation by any scandalous course of life, are seldom known to be over tender of the reputation of their neighbours, but would willingly reduce all men, if they could, to a level with themselves:—And, therefore, such as these are commonly the most censorious. Upon the whole,—no man is fit to be a judge of others who is not blameless in his own conduct:—And how few, then, are they that are, or ought to think themselves qualified for it!

This is what our Blessed Lord himself hath taught us in that wise caution which He gave his hearers, (Matt. vii. 3.)—and with this excellent lesson of advice I shall conclude this discourse:—

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam which is in thine own eye?

Or

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.—

To God the Father, &c.

S E R M O N XIV.

Rules for Trial of the Spirits.

I John iv. 1.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: Because many false Prophets are gone out into the world.

ONE of the greatest blessings, that was ever vouchsafed to mankind, was the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles and Disciples of our Saviour on the day of Pentecost, which is the subject of our commemoration and thanksgiving upon this day: It was this that qualified them to preach the Gospel with success, and to convert mankind to the belief of it.

And it was necessary that they should be thus miraculously inspired, because they were to transmit the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, in all its purity and perfection, not only by their preaching but their writings, to

all succeeding generations;—and these are what we have collected together in the books of the New Testament. As this was to be the rule and standard of our Christian faith and duty, it was necessary that the Writers of these books should be preserved from error and mistake in the composing of them: And therefore our Saviour promised to send them that Spirit of truth who, by his infallible inspiration, was to guide them into all truth; and, moreover, should endue them with a power of working miracles, by which they might prove themselves to be inspired; and, by doing such mighty works as none but God could enable them to do, might leave a most convincing proof to all succeeding generations, that they were truly Messengers or Teachers sent from God.

But now it has been the folly of some, in all ages, to confound this extraordinary inspiration of the Apostles with the common and ordinary assistance of God's Holy Spirit, or rather with their own wild fancies and imaginations,—either to think themselves inspired when they were not, or, which is worse, to pretend to inspiration, merely to serve some worldly ends or interests:—And it was this that gave occasion to that admonition of our

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Apostle

Apostle in my text: *Beloved*, says he, *believe not every spirit,—i. e. every one who either thinks himself inspired, or else pretends to be so; but try the spirits whether they are of God; and that (as he adds immediately) because many false Prophets, or false pretenders to inspiration, were then gone out into the world.*

Here, then, it is supposed, that there was some way or other to try those spirits; some plain and certain rules whereby to know the false Prophets from the true, so as that honest and well-meaning people, if they used a proper degree of care and caution, might not be deceived and seduced by them.—And, without doubt, there must be such:—For it is neither reconcileable with the wisdom nor the goodness of God (who hath promised that he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able) to lay such a stumbling-block in the way of the upright and sincere Christian, as that he should unavoidably fall into error and delusion.

There must be some means or other, therefore, for such as these to avoid this dangerous snare;—some rules, as I said, whereby to try the spirits, and to discern the false Prophets from the true:—And what these are I shall endeavour to shew in the following discourse,
only

only premising, that by a false Prophet is meant one who comes to us in the name of God, but has no authority from God to do so;—and that, whether he pretends to foretell things to come, (which is the notion of a Prophet in the stricter sense) or whether he only takes upon him the office of a Teacher and Preacher of religion, which is the more large and general sense of the word,—if he pretends to a Divine authority for what he does, when at the same time he has no such authority, he is a false Prophet in the sense of Holy Scripture.

And, therefore, we may observe, that a false Prophet, and a false Teacher, are used in the same sense in the New Testament:—Thus St. Peter, in his second Epistle, ch. 2. *But there were false Prophets among the people, even as there shall be false Teachers among you.* And the same, no doubt, is what St. John means by a false Prophet in my text.

I shall only add, that these false Prophets, or Teachers, may be so in a two-fold respect, either by pretending falsely to a commission from God, which they have not; or, if truly called and commissioned, yet, by preaching such doctrines as are contrary to the Word of God, and which therefore He could never au-

thorise them to teach ;—in either of these senses a man may be justly styled a false Prophet.

Let us now proceed to inquire,

First, What rules they had in the Apostles days to try the spirits, and to distinguish the false Prophets or Teachers from the true.

Secondly, What rules there are for us, or for the Christians of those days, in like manner, to know and distinguish them.

1st, What rules they had in the Apostles days to try the spirits, and to distinguish the false Prophets or Teachers from the true.

And here we shall find, upon inquiry, that they had three rules for this purpose ; by one or other whereof they could not fail of knowing the false Prophets and Teachers from the true.

The first was the miraculous gifts which were then bestowed upon the true Prophets or Teachers.

The second, their obedience and subjection to the Apostles of our Blessed Saviour, as the great directors of their ministry.—

And the last was the agreement of their doctrine with the doctrines taught by Christ and his Apostles.

One rule, then, which the first Christians had to distinguish the false Prophets from the true,

true, was the miraculous gifts so plentifully bestowed in the first age of Christianity.

For, as our Saviour sent forth his Apostles to preach a new religion to mankind, he endued them with a power of working miracles, as a proof of their being inspired and sent by God: And, without this, the doctrine of the Gospel could never have spread itself so quickly over the world, or have been received as a Divine revelation.

This power of doing miracles was so necessary to the discharge of their office, as Apostles, or Messengers of God to the world, that St. Paul expressly calls it the sign of an Apostle.—It was what he himself laid claim to, and none was to be esteemed as an Apostle without it: *Truly the signs of an Apostle* (says he) *were wrought amongst you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*—2 Cor. xii. 12.

Nor was this extraordinary inspiration so peculiar to the Apostles, in that age of miracles, but that others likewise had their share of spiritual gifts, conferred upon them through the hands of the Apostles, for the more easy propagating of the Christian faith:—And hence it is that we find St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, laying down cer-

tain rules or cautions for those who were possessed of those gifts, in order to the better and more successful exercise of them.

For it may behove us to consider, that the inspiration of the first Christians, however miraculous and extraordinary, was no wild impulse that could not be restrained; but *the spirits of the Prophets were subject to the Prophets*, as we are told expressly, 1 Cor. xiv. 32. And the Apostles, by that authority committed to them by our Saviour, were to prescribe laws and rules for the behaviour, and the preaching, even of these inspired persons, as may be seen from what St. Paul takes upon him to do in that Epistle.

And this, indeed, was highly necessary to prevent those differences and disorders that might otherwise arise from an unseasonable or unlimited exercise of those prophetic gifts.

Here, then, was a second rule for the trial of the spirits in those days, and distinguishing the false Teachers from the true; namely, whether they were subject to the Apostles in the exercise of their ministry, and obeyed those rules which they enjoined them;—if not, their pretence to inspiration might justly be suspected; they were, in this respect at least, to be disapproved or condemned.

Nothing

Nothing is more plain than the truth of that observation of St. Paul, that *God is not the author of confusion*: He is a lover of peace, of order, and regularity; and, in matters of religion, more especially, would have every thing done (if possible) in a regular and orderly manner.

And to this purpose, therefore, even in those times of Christianity that we are speaking of, when there was such a plentiful and miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit, yet nevertheless the Ministers and Teachers of religion were appointed in a regular dependence and subordination to each other.

Thus we are told expressly, Eph. iv. 11. that, when our Saviour Christ *ascended up on high, and gave gifts unto men*,—i. e. distributed his spiritual gifts amongst his followers, and assigned to every one their proper office in his Church,—*He gave some Apostles; and some Prophets; and some Evangelists; and some Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

Whether by the Prophets and Evangelists are meant those who had received an extraordinary inspiration; and, by the others, the common Pastors and Ministers, as some learn—

ed men suppose; or whether these last, as well as the others, were extraordinarily gifted; yet this is certain, that they were all of them subject to the Apostles, who were to be the great directors of their ministry: And, if any one was too proud or unruly to submit to the regulations and orders of his Superiors, his spirit (they might well conclude) was not from God.

And this seems to be the meaning of that rule which is given by St. John, but a few verses below my text:—*We* (says he, meaning himself and the other Apostles) *are of God; He that knoweth God beareth us*, (that is, heareth and obeyeth us the Apostles;) *be that is not of God beareth not us: Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.*

A third rule which the first Christians had for trying the spirits, and knowing the false teachers from the true, was by the doctrines which they taught:—If they went contrary to the doctrines of the Gospel, or that plain rule of faith and life which had been delivered by our Saviour Christ and his Apostles, they were by no means to be heard. I need only cite the words of St. Paul to this purpose, which are very strong and full,—Gal. i. 8, 9. *Though we, says he, or an Angel from heaven, preach*

preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. This plain declaration is so strong and full that we need not look for any other.

And let this, therefore, suffice for my second head: What rules they had in the Apostles days to try the spirits, and to distinguish the false Prophets or Teachers from the true.—

Let us proceed to inquire,

Thirdly, What rules there are in our days, in like manner, to know and distinguish them, so as that the honest and well-meaning Christian may not be imposed upon by false Prophets or Teachers.

And here we shall find, that the same rules which the first Christians had will, if rightly applied, be a sufficient direction to Christians now, and at all times.

For, first, if men pretend to come to us with an extraordinary message from God, or boast of an extraordinary inspiration, such as the Apostles had, we may justly require of them to give the same, or the like extraordinary proof of it:—Let them work miracles, and we will believe them:—But, if not, we have

have no reason to take their words for it, or to think any man inspired, merely because he has the assurance to say that he is so.

Our Blessed Lord Himself, to whom God was pleased to give the Spirit without measure, as it is said, John iii. 34. yet nevertheless appealed to the miracles which he performed, as the proper proof or evidence of his Divine mission and authority; and therefore He says expressly of the unbelieving Jews, *If I had not done among them the things which no other man did, they had not had sin.* That is, they could not have been justly blamed for rejecting Him, if He had not proved to them, by miracles, that He was a Prophet sent from God:—And so John x. 37. *If I do not the works of my Father* (such works as plainly evidence a Divine power) *believe me not*: So far was Christ himself from expecting that men should believe Him to be extraordinarily inspired and sent from God, without the proof of miracles to convince them.

And the Apostles, who came with the same Divine authority, gave the same extraordinary proof of it:—Thus we find St. Paul appealing to the miracles which he wrought,

as a proof of his Apostleship,—2 Cor. xii.

12. *Truly, the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*

This, then, is the proof which we may justly expect from those who come to us as Messengers from God, and make pretence to an extraordinary inspiration. If they claim the same privilege with our Saviour Christ and his Apostles, the Prophets or Evangelists, to be sent immediately from God; let them produce the same proofs of it which they did.

But, 2dly, If they pretend to no more than a common and ordinary assistance of God's Holy Spirit, such as any good man may lay claim to; then the two other rules that I have mentioned come in to try them by.—

As, 1st, whether they are subject to Christ and his Apostles, and obey those orders and injunctions they have left us in the New Testament: If they take upon them the office of Prophets and Teachers, have they had a regular call to the ministry? This is a material question; for *how shall they preach* (says St. Paul) *except they be sent?*

Now

Now there are but two ways of sending that we know of, the ordinary and extraordinary one. The extraordinary one was frequent in the first age of the Gospel, when there was a miraculous call to the ministry, and they were inabled to work miracles in proof of it:—But this way of calling (we know) is long since ceased:—At least, if any one pretends to be thus called, he must give the same extraordinary proofs of it.

There is but one way left, then, I mean the regular and orderly way of calling men to the ministry; and that is by the appointment of those who have a proper authority for this purpose.

And this was, indeed, the common and the usual method, even in the days of the Apostles: *As my Father hath sent me, so send I you*, says our Saviour to his Apostles, and thereby conferred upon them an authority of sending others likewise; and this authority the Apostles exercised by appointing, in the several churches, as they were converted to the Christian faith, the proper Ministers to instruct and teach the people; and this they did in a very solemn manner, by prayer and laying on of hands. Thus St. Paul exhorts Timothy *not to neglect the gift that was in him*

(or

(or the office that had been conferred upon him) *by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery*; or, as it is 2 Tim. i. 6. *by the laying on of my hands*; that is, the hands of St. Paul himself,—assisted by other Presbyters that were then present, for the more solemnity of the ordination.

And, in another place, he gives him this caution, that he should *lay bands suddenly on no man*;—That is, that he should ordain none to the ministry but with the utmost care and circumspection.

And the same method that was practised by the Apostles has been continued down to us:—The Bishops, or supreme Pastors in the Church of God, to whom a power of ordination was committed by the Apostles themselves, having ever since ordained persons to the office of the ministry, from time to time, in a regular succession, and without any interruption that we know of.

But, be the succession interrupted or uninterrupted, the regularity and order of the thing is (without question) of perpetual obligation.—If any one, therefore, take upon him the office of a Minister or Teacher of religion without this regular call and ordination to the ministry, there is just reason (surely)

ly) to question whether his spirit be from God.

It is, indeed, highly necessary, in the reason of the thing, as well as agreeable to the whole tenor of the Scriptures, that the Ministers and public Preachers of religion should be appointed with the utmost care and circumspection.—They are to be the guides of souls in difficult and doubtful cases, which every one that conceits himself to be so is not qualified for:—They are to study and explain the Holy Scriptures, which (whatsoever some may think) requires some share of learning (I might say a great deal) to understand them perfectly. A proper education, therefore, seems to be of absolute necessity to qualify a person for this great and sacred office; and, if men, in case of their health, are scrupulous of applying to any other than a regular Apothecary or Physician, they have much more reason to be scrupulous in the care of their souls.

Without such care and caution, it is highly probable, considering what an high opinion most men entertain of their own abilities, the world would soon be over-run with Teachers;—the ignorant, probably, would be the most

most forward, and the blind lead the blind till both fall into the ditch.

But do we then claim to ourselves, as an authorised and regular ministry, a privilege to be heard and to be obeyed implicitly? Would we deprive you of the use of reason, or forbid you to judge for yourselves? No, certainly;—for this was the

3d rule I mentioned, whereby to try the spirits: That if any one, though never so regularly called to the office of the ministry, should preach a doctrine contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel, or to that rule of faith and life which is delivered to us in the Holy Scriptures; such a Teacher is not to be heard;—his spirit cannot be from God.

This, indeed, is the chief point in difference between us and the Church of Rome;—and, in this particular, all that have reformed from that Church unite and agree with us. We acknowledge the Holy Scriptures for the only rule of our faith; and to these it is that we appeal for the proofs of our religion:—They have many doctrines and practices which are not to be reconciled with Holy Scripture, and therefore they will not allow the Scripture alone to be the rule or standard of their faith, but build much upon uncertain traditions,

tions, and most of all upon the infallibility of their Church:—But that a Church made up of fallible men should be infallible seems contrary to reason; and that theirs is not so is as plain in fact; for they have fallen into many, and gross errors:—And, what is the most deplorable circumstance of the case, they dare not to correct their errors, for fear their infallibility should be called in question.—Their well known policy, therefore, is to keep their people in ignorance and in awe,—and to conceal from them the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, lest by these they should discern too plainly the corruptions into which they are fallen:—Our people, on the other hand, are not only allowed, but exhorted, to read the Holy Scriptures, and to use their own best reason and judgment for the understanding of them,—that so their faith may rest upon a right foundation; *not in the wisdom of men* (as the Apostle speaks) *but in the wisdom and the word of God*, 1 Cor. ii. 5.

—But, nevertheless, they will consider, that, as there are some things plain and easy in the Scriptures, so there are some things hard to be understood; and that they *who are unlearned and unstable*, but especially such as with little learning have a great conceit of them—

themselves and their own capacity, may wrest those sacred Writings to their own destruction.

It is, therefore, a great instance both of the wisdom and goodness of Almighty God, that He hath appointed an order of men on purpose, whose proper profession it is to study and explain the Holy Scriptures, and to assist men in the right understanding of them:—That, as under the Old Testament the Priests were to preserve knowledge, and the people were to seek the Law at their mouths; so under the New Testament the Gospel might be preached by those who are duly qualified and authorised for that purpose: And as under the Old Testament the last appeal was to the Law itself, or to the Writings of Moses and the Prophets; *to the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, there is no light in them*: So we acknowledge it to be the same under the New Testament: The Holy Scriptures are to be the rule of our preaching, which we are never to depart from or contradict;—they were given to make us wise unto salvation;—and that all things necessary to salvation are contained therein is the express doctrine of our Church, in her Articles.

I have now done with the main argument which I proposed, and have only, in the last place, to make some uses and improvement of what has been said, and so conclude.

And, 1st, From what has been delivered under the foregoing heads, we may learn to make a true judgment of those who take upon them the office of Preachers without any regular call to the ministry, but merely upon this pretence that they are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to preach the Gospel. If we ask them, How they know that they are thus inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost? They can give no proof of it but only this, that they believe it, nay, they feel it, they are sure of it;—that is, they have a strong imagination that it is so: But a strong imagination, surely, is no proof of any thing: If it were so, we know there have been some men who, by a mere strength of imagination, have fancied themselves to be Kings and Emperors;—and these, therefore, have, in reality, as much right to their kingdoms, as the others to be Ministers or Preachers of religion.

That extraordinary inspiration with which the Apostles and first Christians were endued,
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it ought never to be forgotten, was attended with a power as extraordinary, I mean a power of working miracles:—By this it was that they were well assured of the inspiration themselves; by this they were able to prove it convincingly to others;—it was this that spread the Christian faith throughout the world, and made it to be received as a Divine institution;—for, where men saw the power of God so eminently appear, they readily inferred the truth and the Divinity of the revelation:—This, therefore, must afford a clear and rational conviction. But the men that we are now speaking of have no such proof to give us; they are void of all authority from God or man, and usurp the sacred office to the peril of themselves and those that hear them.

But, 2dly, There is another use which we should make of this discourse, by way of caution to ourselves:—We should take care that the wild notions and practices of these men do not create a prejudice in us, and possess us with a less esteem for religion in general, or any particular doctrines of Christianity; for there is nothing so good but may be mistaken or abused, and an ill use made of it: And thus the doctrines of Christianity may be

mistaken or misrepresented by weak or ignorant people, and they may express a great zeal for the Gospel of our Saviour, at the same time that they are going contrary to the rules and precepts of the Gospel.

There are two extremes, in matters of religion, which men of sense and sobriety will always endeavour carefully to avoid: The one is a lukewarmness and indifference; the other an ignorant and mistaken zeal,—a zeal without knowledge (as St. Paul calls it): The former often leads to infidelity, as the other to enthusiasm or religious madness. And though these may seem the most unlike, and as opposite as can be; yet, in fact, they oftentimes beget each other.—The impiety and wickedness of the times provokes the zeal of good men, and sometimes transports them even beyond the bounds of reason;—and some little extravagancies committed by these, the effects, perhaps, of an over-heated brain, shall bring a contempt on religion itself, with those who either have not strength of reason and solidity enough to distinguish things, or whose vicious inclinations may corrupt their judgment.

But, as virtue evermore consists in a golden mean, so, in this case, the right and regular
conduct

conduct lies betwixt these two extremes : As you should beware of an intemperate and ignorant zeal, you are no less concerned, on the other hand, not to grow careless and indifferent in matters of religion :—As you are to avoid the folly of enthusiasm, so you must beware of the evil heart of unbelief (as the Scripture calls it) the more dangerous and destructive error of the two.

But, 3dly, and more particularly, with regard to that doctrine which has been so much mistaken and abused, I mean the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, which is promised in the Gospel : Here too we must be careful to avoid extremes, and not be so weak as to renounce the doctrine itself, because of the mistakes which some have fallen into about it.

That God assists good men, both in the knowledge and practice of their duty, by the secret operation of his Holy Spirit, is a plain and certain doctrine of Christianity :—But that the motions of the Holy Spirit are to be distinguished from the natural workings of our own minds, or the suggestions of the evil Spirit by any thing to be felt in these motions themselves, does not appear from Holy Scripture :—The only way we have to distin-

guish them is to bring them to the standard of truth, and those rules of right and wrong, of good and evil, which are fixed and certain. —If the thing suggested to us be right and good, we have some reason to conclude the motion is from God ;—if otherwise, we may be sure it is owing either to the corruptions of our own nature, or the delusions of the evil Spirit :—This is a most safe and certain rule to go by.

But when men are once possessed with a notion that every strong impulse is a dictate of the Holy Spirit ;—that they are governed by Him in every thing they do or say, so that it is scarce possible for them to fall either into sin or error (which is a very common imagination of Enthusiasts :) This, we find upon experience, opens the way to all manner of extravagancies. Possessed with these wild notions, an ignorant mechanic shall take upon him to be a Teacher and Preacher of the Gospel, and, what one cannot think of without concern, ascribe all the ravings of a distempered brain to the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost,—

S E R M O N XV.

John v. 14.

*Behold, thou art made whole : Sin no more, lest
a worse thing come unto thee.*

THIS was the command of our Saviour to the impotent man, or cripple, whom he had healed, and restored to perfect soundness at the pool of Bethesda.

In the foregoing verses of this chapter we have a full account of this miraculous cure ; and as it was customary with the Blessed Jesus, when he had wrought a cure upon the body, to second it with some good advice to the soul ; so He did here :—*Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, (says St. John) and said unto him, Thou art made whole : Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*—

Most of the Commentators upon this passage have observed, that our Saviour's admonition to the man, *to sin no more*, implies that he had been a sinner heretofore, and that

this infirmity had been inflicted on him as a punishment for his sins.

This might be so in the case of this particular person: But then we are not to conclude from hence that this is the case of every one that labours under any calamity or affliction:—God may have other reasons for afflicting men besides the punishing them for their sins: As to try their patience, and improve their virtue; to serve some end of his Providence here, or advance their future happiness.—For these, as well as other wise and good reasons, we sometimes see the best of men afflicted: Nor are we to judge of men's righteousness or unrighteousness, their being in a state of favour or disfavour with God, by any thing which they enjoy or suffer here in this life:—For, as to the outward dispensations of Divine Providence, the Wise Man's observation must take place, *That no man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him.*

However, this may be said in general, that, as sin was the original cause of all the evil that was introduced into the world, so it is at present the great occasion of all the evils and calamities that befall mankind: They are sometimes the fruit and effect of our own sins, sometimes of the sins of others; are sometimes
necessary

necessary to prevent men from sinning, and sometimes to reclaim them from it; are sent to chastise the wicked for their wickedness, or to exercise the good man's patience, and improve his virtue: In short, they are designed to awaken and reclaim, and make us better. The Providence of God is concerned in the appointing or permitting them, and his Providence is likewise concerned in the removal of them.

As therefore it becomes us, when we lie under any sickness, or other affliction, to acknowledge the hand of God in it, to consider wherefore it is sent, and to make that use of it which God designed it for; so, when He is pleased in mercy to remove it, it is the duty of a Christian to return Him thanks and praise, and to apply to himself that exhortation of our Saviour in my text,—*Behold, thou art made whole: Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

There are two things observable in the words of my text:

The first implied,—That sin is the great and general occasion of all the diseases and calamities that befall mankind.

The second, That it behoves all those who have been recovered from the bed of sickness,

or

or delivered from any other calamity or affliction, to be mindful of this exhortation of our Saviour Christ,—to go, *sin no more*.

1st, That sin is the great and general occasion of all the sickness and diseases, as well as all the other calamities and afflictions that befall mankind.

And this is what we may collect from the words of St. Paul, (Rom. v. 12.) *For by one man* (meaning the first man, Adam) *sin entered into the world, and death by sin*. It was the sin of our first parents that first brought death into the world, and all the other evils that attend us in this state of our mortality:—So that sin was the original cause, at least, of all the miseries that we suffer.

And, indeed, when man was once become a sinful creature, pain and misery, and even death itself, became absolutely necessary for him; not only as the just chastisement of his wickedness, but to prevent him from growing more and more wicked:—For, had he none of these to feel or fear, what bounds do we think he would ever set to his follies or extravagancies?

It is remarkable that, in the first ages of the world before the flood, when the life of man was suffered to run on, and to extend it-
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self to near a thousand years ; though the memory of God's creation was still fresh upon their minds, and they had the fall of Adam for a warning to them, as well as his repentance (no doubt) and exhortations to direct and guide them ; yet, in less than seventeen hundred years the race of men were become so degenerate and corrupt, that no methods were sufficient to reclaim them : No, not even the threatening them with an utter extirpation ; which, after God had long forewarned them of, and had waited in vain for their repentance, He was pleased to execute in such a manner as should leave a terrible example to all posterity :—He brought a flood upon the earth, and destroyed them all but Noah and his family.

And from henceforth the life of man was shortened, by degrees, till it stood at fourscore years, or thereabout :—And this too subjected to many accidents that may cut it off before its time,—that so the sense of his mortality might be a check upon him in his evil courses, and the shortness and uncertainty of life, together with the pains and miseries that attend it, might be as a course of discipline, intended to reform, reclaim, and make him better :—In short, that he might have always something

something either to feel or fear, whereby he might be kept within the paths of duty and obedience.—

In this view, then, and considering the present state of things and the great proneness of mankind to sin, the evils and calamities that overspread the world are absolutely necessary for us, and are, in reality, as much an instance of the wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence as those other and more agreeable dispensations which we have learned to distinguish by the name of blessings, those effects of his bounty which he pours upon us in such abundance.—

It was, indeed, a question very much controverted among the ancients, if God be good, How comes it to pass that there is so much evil in the world? The goodness of God was a truth of which they could not doubt; and, on the other hand, that the world was overrun with evil of all sorts was a truth as certain to them from experience:—And how to reconcile this with the goodness of the Divine Providence and Government over mankind seemed, to them, (as I said) a very hard question.

But if by evil, in this question, be meant moral evil, the evil of sin; and if it be asked,

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How it comes to pass that there is so much wickedness in the world?—The answer is plain and easy, not from any want of goodness in Almighty God, but from the folly and perverseness of men, and the abuse of that freedom wherein they were created.—

It is no way inconsistent, surely, with the goodness of Almighty God to make man a free creature, and, having endued him with reason and understanding, to give him a law to observe, and, at the same time, a liberty or command over his own actions. If men will abuse that liberty or power which God has given them, refuse to hearken to the dictates of right reason, or to obey the law of their Creator, they fall into a course of sin, through their own fault and choice; proceed from bad to worse; their iniquities increase, and their heart grows more and more corrupt; their example or persuasions draw in others to the same perverse and evil courses: And thus it is that wickedness spreads and propagates itself in the world, in defiance of all those gracious remedies which the goodness of God hath provided against it.

But if by evil, in the question before us, be meant natural evils, such as pain and sickness, and all the other private or public calamities
to

to which mankind are subject; and if it be asked, How these can be reconciled with the infinite wisdom and goodness of God? The answer is yet plainer,—for it is certain this kind of evils must of necessity follow, where moral evil or sin has been once introduced;—they are very often the immediate effects of sin and wickedness: Sometimes they are intended by the justice of Almighty God to punish and chastise it; and many times they are the tokens of his mercy, sent with a gracious design either to prevent men from running headlong into the ways of sin, or to awaken and reclaim them from it: And what is thus highly fit and necessary can be no objection either to the wisdom or the goodness of God.

Upon the whole, then, we see that sin is the great and general occasion of all the evils and calamities that befall mankind: They are sometimes the natural effect of our sins, sometimes of the sins of others; are sometimes necessary to prevent us from sinning, and sometimes to reclaim us from it; are sent to chastise the wicked for their wickedness, or to exercise and improve the good man's virtue, to awaken, to reform, to make him better:—The Providence of God is concerned in the appointing or permitting them, and his Providence

Providence is likewise concerned in the removal of them.

And as it becomes us, therefore, when we lie under any calamity or affliction, to acknowledge the hand of God in it, and to apply to Him for the removal of it, after it has wrought those good effects which He intended and designed it for; so, when He is pleased in mercy to remove it, it is our duty to be thankful to Him, and to shew our gratitude towards Him by the future conduct of our life. And this was the

Second thing I observed from the words of my text :

Behold, thou art made whole, says our Saviour : Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

Where He shews us plainly what are the fruits which God expects, what the returns that should be made by those who have been at any time delivered from some signal evil or calamity :—They are to beware they do not abuse the mercy of God by still continuing in their sins, but should set up a prevailing resolution, for the time to come, to pay a more exact obedience to his laws.

This is what gratitude and duty, in the first place, will oblige them to: For, the more
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men have received at the hands of God, the more are they obliged to love, to honour, to obey Him : The more ungrateful will they be, if they continue in a course of wickedness and disobedience to Him.

There is a yet farther obligation upon such as these to walk in newness of life, that they may fulfil those vows and promises of amendment that are usually made in times of danger,—especially when men see their danger great : —It is then, if not before, they see the folly of a wicked life, and begin to think seriously of God and religion, and another world.

For want of religion is, in reality, in most men, merely owing to a want of thought or consideration ;—and want of thought is owing to a thousand little avocations which the business and the pleasures of the world are ever laying before men in the time of health ; so that multitudes scarce ever think of the great end for which they were sent into the world till the moment they are to go out of it.

For, in this state of hurry and tumult, which the busy world engages and detains men in, the body (as it were) runs away with the soul : —Their care is all bestowed upon the former, while the other stands deplorably neglected.

But, when the world and its engagements begin to vanish and disappear, as they will when men are laid upon a bed of sickness, it is then the soul resumes its throne again,—and, conscious of its own existence after death, will force the unhappy man to give some due attention to his great concern,—to think with sorrow on the time he has mispent and lost, the many sins he has been guilty of, the little good that he has done; his neglect, or scorn, perhaps, of the ways of piety and religion, and all the other follies and miscarriages of his life:—It is then he has recourse to prayers, and vows, and the most solemn resolutions (if God shall please to spare him) to redeem his past miscarriages by a stricter course of piety and virtue for the time to come.

When, therefore, God has heard his prayers, and graciously restored him to a state of health; when He has given him a new life, even beyond his hopes, as well as his deserts; what can be said for him if he presently forget his solemn vows and obligations, if he return to his former course of sin, in spite of all his resolutions and his promises of amendment?

And yet this is but too commonly the behaviour of those who have been recovered

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from a bed of sickness:—They see their danger past, and with the danger all their fears are gone;—their vows and resolutions quickly follow after, and are soon forgotten; the temptations that formerly prevailed over them again assault them with the same success; and, in defiance of all the promises they made to God in the time of their distress, their purposes of amendment vanish by degrees, and the same bad course of life in a little time returns again.

But how seasonable is the advice of the Wise Man to such as these! *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed: Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.*

But, lastly, Not only gratitude and justice should oblige men to forsake their sins, in return for the mercies God hath shewn them; but likewise the danger they incur, if they do otherwise, of exposing themselves to a so much greater punishment.

For this is plainly intimated by our Saviour in my text: *Sin no more* (says he) *lest a worse thing come unto thee*;—lest some greater calamity by far, than that from which I have

now delivered thee, should fall upon thee all at once, as a reward for so much baseness and ingratitude.

And this, indeed, is oftentimes the method of Divine Providence, even in this world, when gentle chastisements fail to work their due effect upon men, to visit them with his sharper and severer judgments. If there be any of you therefore here present, who have been once, or twice, or perhaps oftener, raised up from the bed of sickness, and yet have shewn no fruits of it in the amendment of your lives; consider how easily the same Almighty hand that raised you up can cast you down again, and how justly he might lay the same, or worse diseases and calamities, upon you;—and then with what heart will you renew those vows and resolutions which you made before, but falsely and perfidiously have broken: *Be not deceived*, says the Apostle, *God is not mocked*;—there is no imposing on that wise and holy Being, who sees the hearts of all men, and hates all false and hypocritical pretences: And how can you expect that He should hear your vows and promises again, when you have once already shewn Him how lightly you can break them? The condition of such persons, surely, must be

very deplorable, and *their latter end*, as our Saviour speaks, *worse with them than the beginning*.

Upon the whole, then, and that I may close up this discourse with a suitable application, it is a very dangerous thing (we see) to trifle with the patience and long-suffering of God;—and, as sickness is one of those gracious methods used by God to call men to repentance, what can be said for those who refuse to turn and to repent, when God Himself so loudly calls them to it? Or, if they put up some forced and feeble vows of amendment upon a sick bed, yet make haste to forget them again, as soon as ever they recover;—surely such persons have just cause to fear that God may cast them down again, and reduce them to a worse condition than before.—Be wise now, therefore, and consider, all you that have already experienced the great mercy and forbearance of God; consider that every sin you now commit will be attended with a double guilt, and will increase your future condemnation. Despise not, therefore, the riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; but let this great and signal mercy work its due effect upon thee, and lead thee to repentance: *Behold,*
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thou art made whole ; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

I have only to add, that, if there be any here present who may think themselves unconcerned in this discourse, because they have all their lives enjoyed a state of health, and were never laid upon a bed of sickness ; such as these would do well to consider, that they are as much indebted to Almighty God for the preservation of their health, as others may be for the recovery of their's :—And therefore a sense of gratitude for so great a blessing ought to keep them stedfast to their duty, and to make them walk in all the ways of God's commandments.

They should consider, moreover, that a long enjoyment of health for the time past is no security of our enjoying it for the time to come ;—no, not so much as for the morrow ; for we know not what a day may bring forth. It is, I think, a common observation, that to those who have enjoyed a long state of health distempers are usually more dangerous and more fatal, when they come : There have been many who have had but one sickness in their lives, and that has been their last,

I conclude all, therefore, with that excellent advice of the Son of Syrach, Ecclus. xviii. 21. *Humble thyself before thou be sick, and, in the time of sins, shew repentance.*

Let nothing binder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not until death to be justified. And, in another place, Ecclus. v. 6. *Say not thou, God's mercy is great, and He will be pacified for the multitude of my sins:*

For mercy and wrath come from Him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners.

Therefore make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from day to day:

Lest suddenly the wrath of God come forth, and in thy security thou be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance.

S E R M O N XVI.

Micah vi. 8.

*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good :
And what doth the Lord require of thee, but
to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk
humbly with thy God.*

THE Prophet, in the beginning of this chapter, calls upon the mountains, with which Judea was surrounded, to hear and to be witness ; *for the Lord had a controversy with his people.*

What this controversy was we learn from the following parts of the chapter ; for God, by his Prophet, taxes them with ingratitude, in not being duly thankful for their deliverance out of Egypt ; with violence and oppression, *and the scant measure which is abominable*, ver. 10 ; and, lastly, with their idolatries, to which they were but too prone ; their walking according to *the statutes of Omri* and *the works of the house of Ahab*, verse the

last: And yet, guilty as they were of these apparent crimes, they seem to have deceived themselves with a fond belief that their being exact in the performance of their customary sacrifices might possibly atone for all their wickedness:—And against this persuasion it is that the Prophet seems to have directed the words of my text; wherein he tells them plainly that the things which God was best pleased with, and what he chiefly required, were not their sacrifices, how many or how rich soever; but their doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with their God.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good:—He hath given thee such a rule of life as is good in all respects, and must needs produce, if well observed, the greatest good;—good for thyself; good for the world about thee; good for thee here in this life; and such as will infallibly procure thee the greatest good, an inestimable reward, a state of everlasting happiness in a life to come.—And He hath not only shewed thee what is good, but He requires it of thee as a duty,—as a duty of the highest obligation,—that thou shouldst endeavour to promote thy own and other people's happiness; to do thyself the greatest good by

by intending the good of others, and by observing those good rules which He hath set before thee for this purpose, such as justice and mercy towards men, and a devout humility or piety towards God, as the root or principle of all duty:—*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee?* (that is, comparatively speaking:)—There is nothing which He demands of thee so absolutely, or sets so high a value upon, as this,—*that thou shouldst do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.* This is the plain meaning of the words before us.

But, because there is something remarkable in the foregoing verses, as they stand connected with the words of my text,

I shall first consider and explain the whole passage,—and then proceed,

2dly, To raise the proper observations from it.

The words of my text are thus introduced from ver. 5. *O my people, remember now what Balak, King of Moab, consulted, and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord.*

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Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

The Prophet here very plainly alludes to the story of Balak and Balaam, which is told us in the Book of Numbers, and which, therefore, it may be necessary to consider briefly, as it will throw some light upon this passage.

In the xxiid chapter of Numbers we are told, that, when the Israelites, in their journeyings from Egypt, were come into the plains of Moab, and were now upon the borders of the promised land, that Balak, King of Moab, sent for Balaam, a man famous over all those Eastern countries as a Prophet, that he might denounce a curse upon them; for he thought that by this means he should
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the more easily overcome them :—Come now (says he) *I pray thee, curse me this people, for they are too mighty for me; peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed, ver. 6.*

Balaam, though of himself enough inclined to do as Balak had desired him, yet knew it was in vain that he should curse this people, unless God approved and ratified it;—and therefore he refused to go with the messengers at first, having no permission so to do: But, upon a second message, God complied so far as to give him leave to go, but nevertheless gave him express charge to say neither more nor less than what should be revealed unto him.

When Balaam, therefore, comes to Balak, he tells him plainly the extent of his commission; that he had no power at all to say any thing of himself, but the word which God should put into his mouth, that he must speak, Numb. xxii. 38,

That they might therefore render God propitious to them, we find the King of Moab and the Prophet going from place to place, and from one hill to another, and taking different

ferent views and prospects of the army of Israel, as it lay incamped before them; and upon every hill offering a fresh number of sacrifices, and these of the most acceptable kind; seven bullocks and seven rams, the choice of all his flocks and herds, no doubt;—but all was to no purpose; God was resolved to bless the Israelites, and therefore at three several times turned the Prophet's curse into a blessing: There was *no iniquity in Jacob*, and therefore there could be *no enchantment against Israel*: They were at this time free from all idolatry, and obedient to the Law of God, and therefore no attempts of their enemies could prosper or prevail against them.

This, then, is the history in brief;—and the lesson drawn from it in my text is this:—How unavailing the most costly sacrifices are; how far from being acceptable to God, when not attended with true piety, justice, mercy, and a good disposition of the heart in those that offer them.

For this was the case of Balak in the history there told us: He might move from hill to hill, and from place to place, from Shittim even unto Gilgal (as it is said in the verse before my text); he might raise altars by sevens, and offer upon each his burnt-offerings
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and calves of a year old;—but all this solemnity, this outward profession of religion and devotion, would avail him nothing;—he wanted those true inward dispositions and qualifications which God requires in those who worship him;—he was neither *just* nor *merciful*, nor did he *walk humbly with God*: And this appears plainly from his behaviour upon this occasion;—for, instead of being satisfied with the answers God had given him, he dismisses Balaam with contempt, and not without some reflection too on God Himself for disappointing him: Go, *flee thou to thy place* (says he to the old Prophet;) *I thought to promote thee to great honour; but lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour*, Numb. xxiv.

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We see then the history and the application of it; but there is still something further necessary to a full understanding of this passage of the Prophet Micah, and the clearing up my text:—And therefore I must observe that we have here a sort of dialogue betwixt Balak, King of Moab, and Balaam, represented to us in the prophetic way, as will appear plainly from an attentive consideration of the passage.

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The Prophet Micah, or rather God by him, addressees himself to the people thus, ver. 5. *O my people, remember now what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him from Shittim even to Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord*: As if he had said, Call to mind the transaction betwixt Balak, King of Moab, and the Prophet Balaam; what the one requested or desired, and what the other answered him, after all their removes from place to place, from Shittim even unto Gilgal; that you may learn from thence to have a true notion of that righteousness which God requires in those who worship Him.

Well, then, what did Balak consult, and what did Balaam answer him? it is natural to ask:—Why, we have the very questions and answers set before us in the following verses, however the Commentators (I know not how) have overlooked the true interpretation of this passage*.—

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* Dr. Butler, in his Sermon on the Character of Balaam, makes the question and answer to be Balak's and Balaam's; —but then he supposes it to be but one question and one answer; the whole 6th and 7th verses to be Balak's, and only the 8th Balaam's reply, viz. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good*: —And he likewise supposes that Micah took it from a book which

The King of Moab asks, ver. 6. *Where- with shall I come before the Lord, and how my- self before the high God?* To which Balaam replies by asking another question: *Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil?* As if he had said, What! can you hope to bribe the great Creator of the world with your gifts and offerings as you would a man? Will he be pleased, think you, *with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil*, supposing you were rich enough to offer it?—The sacrifices you mention are, indeed, of the most acceptable kind, and therefore let us offer them to God; —but I cannot promise you that these will incline Him to grant you that favour you de- fire of Him.

Shall I then (rejoins the King of Moab) *give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* That is, Shall I slay my first-born son, and offer him up as a sacrifice? Even this I am ready to do, if my sins be any obstruction to the Divine fa-

which is not now extant: “As there are many quotations in Scripture out of books which are not come down to us,” says he, p. 121. He likewise explains *the righteousness of the Lord by the righteousness which God will accept.* I am glad of the authority of this great and good man.

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vour, and if it may reconcile the Deity towards me;—and this, sure, is the strongest proof that I can give of the desire I have to please Him.

As horrid as this practice seems to us, it was no uncommon thing amongst the Heathen nations in those barbarous ages of the world: And we read of another King of Moab who actually did what Balak here asks Balaam whether he should do or not; for, being driven to great extremities in a siege, *he took his eldest son (says the text) that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt-offering upon the wall, 2 Kings iii. 27.* Balak was now likewise in great distress, or in great fear at least; for he could not but be alarmed at the sight of so mighty an army as that of the Israelites, flushed with conquest over the Amorites and others, his most potent neighbours.

To his question, however, *Shall I give my first-born for my transgression?* Balaam's reply is only this:—*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

We may be apt to think, perhaps, that the advice, here put into the mouth of Balaam by the

the Prophet Micah, was too good for him to give; but it is to be considered that Balaam's character was of a mixed nature, had something good and something bad in it: He seems to have been a worshipper of the true God, for he received his revelations from the Lord,—that is, from Jehovah, as it is in the original:—He was likewise a true Prophet, for in one of his parables he has a very remarkable prophecy of the Messiah or Christ: But then he was a bad man, for that is certain too from his behaviour:—He knew how to think right, but at the same time acted wrong,—which, God knows, is but too common a character:—He knew wherein true righteousness consisted, and wished to die the death of the righteous; but then his covetousness or ambition would not suffer him always to act uprightly, for *he loved the wages of unrighteousness* (2 Pet. ii. 15.) He was not wanting in his inclination to do what Balak would have had him, and there was need of an Angel with a drawn sword to stand in the way before him, to oppose his covetous intentions, and terrify him into a compliance with the Divine commands;—but this wrought its natural effect upon him, and we find him, in pursuance of it, saying neither more nor

less than what God had put into his mouth, and pouring out repeated blessings upon those whom Balak would have hired him, with the most magnificent gifts and promises, to curse.—

There is something, indeed, in this part of the history, which has afforded great subject of ridicule to the facetious wits and libertines of the present and of former ages, and upon which, therefore, it may not be amiss to bestow a few words, before I proceed to the observations I intend from the text;—I mean the circumstance of the dumb ass speaking with man's voice, and forbidding the madness of the Prophet, as St. Peter expresses it, 2 Epist. ii. 16.

Now, though there be nothing more extraordinary in this than in other miracles, and though we may conceive it an easy thing for an Angel of God (suppose) so to move the organs even of a brute creature, as to draw from thence a voice resembling that of men, and some articulate sounds; yet, to cut off all occasion of such cavil, I must observe, that it has been the opinion of very good Divines, and particularly of the most learned of the Hebrew Doctors, that this whole adventure, here recited, of Balaam and his ass, was trans-

acted merely in a dream or vision, like all the other revelations which were made him.

This is what Maimonides, the most learned of the Jewish Rabbins, observes and contends for,—and lays it down for a maxim, a fixed rule, or a foundation (as he calls it) that, wherever we read in Scripture of the appearance of an Angel, there we must of necessity conclude it to be either in a dream or vision, whether the thing be expressed or not;—for this (he says) was the way, and the only way, wherein God had promised to reveal himself to the Prophets; as appears from Num. xii. 6. *If there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house: With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches.*

From the difference here put betwixt Moses and all other Prophets, that God would speak to Moses mouth to mouth, (as it were) and to the other Prophets only in a dream or vision, this learned man concludes that, whenever God is said to appear, or an Angel of God, with any message to a Prophet, it must be in a dream or vision:—And, therefore, thus it

was, and no otherwise, (he says) that the Angel appeared to Balaam:—It was in vision that he saw him with a drawn sword in his hand:—In vision that he smote his ass with so much anger thrice;—that he heard her speak without surprise,—and that all the other part of this supernatural appearance was transacted. And, indeed, the circumstances of the story plainly favour this opinion, as I could easily shew, would the time permit me.—

And now, if this interpretation be admitted, the little objections that have been made against this story vanish at once.—But, even taking it literally, (as I have before observed) there is nothing more extraordinary in this than in other miracles: Nothing but what we may easily conceive an Angel of God, and much more God Himself, able to perform.

But, having thus considered and explained the passage before us,—it is time to proceed to the observations which I intended to raise from it.

And, first, there is a pleasure in observing the reference here made from one Book of Scripture to another; from the Prophecy of Micah to the Book of Numbers, which was written at least seven hundred years before: For Micah lived and prophesied in the days
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of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah; and this thing happened betwixt Balak and Balaam, just before the Israelites took possession of the land of Canaan: And yet the Prophet bids them call to mind the substance of that history, and draws from it an excellent lesson of instruction for them; which shews how careful this people were to treasure up in their memory past transactions, and especially such as were recorded in the Books of Moses, of which the Book of Numbers is one.

But what I meant chiefly to observe is this: That this reference of one Book of Scripture to another is one of those internal marks of their truth and genuineness, which, to men of true learning and judgment, gives great satisfaction in their study of the Sacred Scriptures: For Books, written at such a distance of time, and yet referring in this manner to each other, do thereby mutually confirm the authority of each other.

A second observation arising from my text is this:—We may observe how prone men have been to rest in the mere outward performances of some acts of worship or devotion, to the neglect of those substantial duties of justice, mercy, and true piety; or that purity of heart and

life which God more especially requires in those that worship Him.

Thus Balak, in the time of his distress, had recourse to sacrifices to atone the Deity, and would have given even his first-born for his transgression, if that would have procured the favour of Almighty God towards him: But, at the same time, he seems to have no thought of turning to God by a sincere repentance, or practising the great duties of justice, mercy, and a sincere and humble piety:—His sins, probably, were dearer to him than every thing besides, and he could part with any thing but these.—

This too was the perverse temper of the Israelites, for which we find their Prophets frequently reprovng them: *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord of Hosts: Bring no more vain oblations: Incense is an abomination unto me. Wash ye, make you clean: Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; Cease to do evil, learn to well.* Without this your sacrifices and oblations will be very idle and insignificant: Nor can the all-wise and righteous God ever look with an eye of favour upon the sacrifice of a wicked person, though he were to come before Him with thousands of rams and

ten thousands of rivers of oil. And it is the same thing now with us under the Christian dispensation. We have a sacrifice, indeed, of inestimable value, of which all the sacrifices under the Law of Moses were but types and shadows: And which, to all those who are rightly prepared by the disposition of their heart and life, shall effectually avail them to the pardon of their sins. But shall we rely upon this sacrifice offered for us by our Saviour Christ, while we continue in a wicked course? God forbid:—This would be, indeed, to sacrifice him again, as it were *to crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. He gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity; and not that we should still continue under it. He came to seek and save that which was lost:* But we are still in a lost and miserable condition, unless we thoroughly renounce the ways of sin. *He was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil:* But they who do the works of that wicked one will still be under his power, notwithstanding all that the Saviour of the world has done to rescue them. Neither his merits nor intercession will avail any thing for those who despise the precepts he has given them, and, at the same time they profess the Christian

faith, lead an ungodly and unchristian life. Of such as these our Blessed Lord Himself hath told us, that He will drive them from his presence, at the last great day, with that just and terrible rebuke, *Depart from Me; I know you not, ye workers of iniquity.*

Permit me, therefore, to make a brief application of the text to your hearts and consciences.

You see here the harmony and agreement of God's dispensations to mankind, from the beginning of the world; what course of life it is that must recommend us to his favour, and without which it will be impossible to please him: *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* These are the lessons, we see, which are given by the Prophets to the people of Israel under the Old Testament: And the same is the design of the Christian dispensation:—The same lessons we find given to us by Christ and his Apostles in the New Testament:—*The grace of God, (saith St. Paul) that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should*

should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

This must be the constant and the general tenor of a Christian's life. And if at any time he fall into sin, he must be humbled in the sight of God for his transgression, and must exercise such a repentance as the nature of the thing requires; abhorring and forsaking of his sin, and living with more care and circumspection for the time to come. And if he thus turn to God by a sincere repentance, he has a promise of pardon through the merits of his Saviour, and by faith in his most precious blood: But if men abuse this grace and mercy of Almighty God so freely offered to them in the Gospel;—if they make it an occasion of continuing in sin, when it was intended to reclaim them from it; they *turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*, (as St. Paul speaks) and wantonly provoke Almighty God to punish them the more severely, in proportion as the favours he had shewn them have been more and greater: *What, Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?* (says St. Paul) *God forbid.* The readiness of Almighty God to pardon the repenting sinner must needs increase his guilt, if he should still remain incorrigible;

rigible : And *how shall the bad Christian escape, if he neglect so great salvation ?*

Let us then resolve to learn and practise this good lesson in my text :—*God hath shewed thee, O man, what is good : And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?* Here is nothing set before you but what is very plain and such as all may understand :—You know what it is to do justly ; you likewise know what it is to love mercy and to walk lowly and humbly with God : And your own consciences will tell you, that it is your duty so to walk, and that, in transgressing these great precepts, you must go contrary even to the sense and reason of your own minds.—How merciful is God, then, in laying your duty thus plainly before you, and requiring no more of you than your own consciences must tell you you are bound to perform ?

In a word, we have here the character of a truly good man set before us for our imitation, without any danger of our being mistaken or deceived : Do you desire to approve yourselves to God by following that which is good ? Observe these plain and easy rules before us : Be strictly conscientious *to do justly* :—Delight in acts of mercy :—And, lastly, and
above

above all, take care that your actions proceed from a religious principle, I mean a sincere piety towards God and an intire obedience to his commands, without which all human virtue will be of little value or significancy.—

To walk humbly with God is, indeed, the first and the most necessary duty,—and will effectually secure the observance of all the rest: For he who lives under an actual sense of God, as the great Maker and Ruler of the world, who sees all his actions here, and will call him to account for them in the day of Judgment; such a person cannot but have the strongest motive to discharge his duty in all respects, and will, through the grace of God, make it his daily care and endeavour to do the will of God, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:—

To whom, with, &c.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVII.

Pſalm cix. 16.

His delight was in curſing, and it ſhall happen unto him: He loved not bleſſing, therefore it ſhall be far from him.

HAVING now read the Act of Parliament againſt profane curſing and ſwearing, there cannot be a more proper ſubject for me to preach upon than that afforded us in the words of my text.

It was the expreſs command of Chriſt to his Diſciples, *Bleſs them that curſe you*: And St. Paul, in like manner, ſays, *Bleſs them that perſecute you: Bleſs, and curſe not*; plainly teaching us, that all curſing, or wiſhing ill to others, is abſolutely forbidden in the Goſpel, as being contrary to the law of Chriſtian charity.

And, as this practice is condemned in the New Teſtament, ſo was it likewise under the Old, as we ſee clearly from the words of the
 Royal

Royal Psalmist in my text : For he tells us, that they who delight in cursing shall be cursed ; and that they who love not blessing shall be themselves the farthest off from being blessed :—*His delight was in cursing, and it shall happen unto him : He loved not blessing, therefore shall it be far from him.*

And yet, what is somewhat strange, when we consider the Psalm before us throughout, we find a great part of it to be nothing else but one continued curse or imprecation : It runs in this strain from verse 5th along to the 15th, that is, for ten verses together ; where we see nothing but bad wishes of all the temporal evils (in a manner) that can possibly befall men :—*Set thou an ungodly man to be ruler over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand.*

When sentence is given upon him, let him be condemned, and let his prayer be turned into sin.

Let his days be few, and let another take his office.

Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread :—Let there be no man to pity him :—Let his posterity be destroyed, and in the next generation let his name be clean put out.

These hard sentences, and some others which we here meet with, seem plainly contrary to the purport of my text, as if the
 Psalmist

Pſalmiſt had intended to contradict by his practice that admirable leſſon he has given us in the words before us.

But this (ſure) can never be the caſe ; and therefore we muſt look out for ſome key to this Pſalm, which may unlock the ſenſe of it, and reconcile one part of it with the other : And we ſhall find, upon inquiry, that the curſes, here recorded, are not the curſes of David, or the Writer of the Pſalm ; but, in reality, the curſes that were thrown out by his enemies againſt him, which he takes occaſion here to mention, and then condemns in the words of my text.

And this will very evidently appear from a careful examination of the whole Pſalm, together with the hiſtory, or occaſion, to which it refers.

My deſign, therefore, in the following diſcourſe, ſhall be,

First, To conſider and explain the Pſalm before us ; and then,

Secondly, To make the proper uſes and obſervations from it.

And, 1ſt, in order to a right underſtanding of the Pſalm before us, it will be neceſſary to inquire into the occaſion upon which it was compoſed.

The

The title only tells us that it is a Psalm of David, without saying any thing of the particular occasion upon which David wrote it:— And, therefore, here we must proceed, as well as we can, and look out for something in the history of David that will best suit with it.

Now there is no part of the story of this great Prince, to which this Psalm can so properly be referred, as to that time of his distress when he fled from Jerusalem on account of his son Absalom's rebellion, and was pursued by the curses and revilings of Shimei, the son of Gera, the Benjamite, of the tribe and family of Saul, as we read at large in the second Book of Samuel, ch. xvi. and, by taking a brief view of the history, as it is there told us, we shall see the better into the true meaning and design of the Psalm before us.

We are told, then, v. 5, that, *when King David came to Baburim, behold, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: He came forth, and cursed still as he came.*

And thus said Shimei, when he cursed, Come out, thou bloody man, thou man of Belial: The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul;—and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom, thy son: And behold

behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.

— In this manner did he go on, insulting and reviling, as he went, with the utmost rage and bitterness.

The behaviour of King David, upon this occasion, is very remarkable and very exemplary, and shews how far his piety had got the better of his passions: For, instead of giving way to that resentment which is apt to rise on so provoking an occasion, he considers this, among the rest of his afflictions, as laid upon him by the wise order of Almighty God. There was one great sin he had been guilty of in the matter of Uriah, which seems to have been the grief and burden of his life: And to this we owe those Penitential Psalms which were composed by him in the anguish of his heart, and which, through the blessing of Almighty God, have been so great a help to devout souls in the exercise of their repentance ever since. David, therefore, when any evil or calamity befel him, seems presently to recollect, that this was no more than he had deserved by that great and crying sin he had been guilty of; and therefore he adores the justice of God, and humbles himself under the discipline of his rod; and considers the
wicked

wicked instruments of his distress as no other than as instruments in the hand of God, to whose chastisements he had reason to submit with patience.

And this will explain his conduct with regard to Shimei, recorded in the following verses of this chapter,—2 Sam. xvi. 9. *Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the King, Why should this dead dog (i. e. this shameless, worthless fellow) curse my Lord the King? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take away his head.*

And the King said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who then shall say, Wherefore hast thou done so?

The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. That is, it is God who, in his wise Providence, permits and suffers him to do so: For, in the phrase of Holy Scripture, God is often said to do what he only suffers to be done. It is certain that God can neither command nor approve of any wickedness; but he often suffers it to take effect, and so directs and overrules it as to bring about the wise ends of his Providence by it. It is their own corrupt hearts that prompt men to do evil; and it is

the goodness, the prerogative of God, to bring good out of evil.

And this, therefore, was what David hoped might be the case here, that some good might possibly arise to him from this wicked behaviour of his adversary, if he bore it with a calm and patient mind: For thus he reasons, verse 11, *And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: How much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse: For the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.*

One would think this gentleness and forbearance of King David should have put an end to the revilings of his adversary; and that he should have been ashamed to continue his curses, which were received with so much meekness, and forgiven with so much generosity:—But the patience of the one is not more to be wondered at than the mad obstinacy and brutality of the other; for it is further told us, verse 13, that, *as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over-against him, and cursed*

as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

We see, then, that this adversary of David's continued his bitter cursings and revilings, for a considerable time together: And I take notice of it the rather, because a great part of the Psalm before us seems to be no other than the very words of Shimei, and the curses which he threw out against David,—and which, as they could not but make a deep impression on his memory, he here repeats, and then condemns in the words of my text.

And this I conceive will appear plain from a view of the Psalm itself, which I shall now proceed to consider.

It begins thus:

Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise; for the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: They have spoken against me with a lying tongue.

Nothing could be more suitable to the occasion I have mentioned than these words of David: He begs of God, the *God of his praise*, as he might justly call him, (for the praises of God have been daily sung in the words of this holy man from one generation to another ever since;) I say, he begs of Him not to stand by as unconcerned at the injurious

treatment given him by his enemies, when *the mouth of the wicked*, meaning Shimei, and *the mouth of the deccitful*, meaning (probably) his treacherous and revolted subjects, were at once *opened against me* (says he) *with a lying tongue*.

The following words are to the same purpose, and may be understood in their plain and obvious sense :

They compassed me about also with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause.

For we are to remember that his son Abalom was at this time in open war against him, and surely none could have less cause for it than he : Nor had he given just cause to any other to be his enemy, no, not the wicked Shimei who had thrown out such bitter curses against him.

And hence he complains in the following verses of their ingratitude towards him, v. 4 :

For my love, or in return for the love I bear them, they are mine adversaries ; but I give myself unto prayer.

5. *And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love, (saying)*

6. *Set thou an ungodly man to be Ruler over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand.*

7. *When*

7. *When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become a sin: And so on.*

I have supplied the word (saying), for I confess it is not in the text; but, nevertheless, it must evidently be understood, to make the sense complete and clear:—For the words, *Set thou an ungodly man to be Ruler over him*, and all that follows for ten verses together, are no other than the speech of David's enemies against him, the bad wishes and imprecations which some one of them, at least, had thrown out against him, and which he here recites.

For it is plain they cannot be the bad wishes of David to his enemies, first, because they are directly contrary to that temper and disposition shewn by David in the other parts of the Psalm; and, next, because they run all along in the singular number, whereas David speaks of his enemies in the plural: *For my love they are mine enemies,—and they have rewarded me evil for good.*—And, therefore, had the curses that follow been intended against them, he would have proceeded, no doubt, in the same continued phrase of speech,—*Set thou an ungodly man to be Ruler over them*;—but the change of number, where these curses begin, is very observable; for they are denounced

against a single person only, and so continue all along to the end of them.

But it may be asked, If these are the curses of David's enemies against him, why then was not the word *saying* here inserted, or something to denote the person speaking?

To this the answer is easy:—That, where a speech is introduced by way of imitation, (as it is here) it is common to omit the word that should denote the person speaking: And of this we have several examples in the Book of Psalms and elsewhere.

Thus, Pf. ii. 2. *The Kings of the earth stand up, and the Rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed: Let us break their bonds asunder.*—

Where the words, *Let us break their bonds asunder*, are the speech of the Kings and Rulers mentioned before: And yet there are no such words as *they say* inserted to give us notice of it. It is added, indeed, in the last Bible Translation, to make the sense more clear: But it is not in the old Translation, nor yet in the Hebrew.

So, Pf. xxii. 7, 8. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,*

He

He trusted in God that He would deliver him.

The word (saying) is not in the Hebrew, but is added by the Translators to shew the meaning of the passage in a better light.

So again, Pf. xli. 7, 8. *All that hate me whisper together against me: Against me do they devise my hurt.*

An evil disease (say they) cleaveth fast unto him: And, now that he lieth, he shall rise up no more.

Where the words *say they* are added by the Translators; for they are not in the Hebrew, neither are they in the old Translation of the Psalms which you have in your Common Prayer Books, and where it runs thus:

All mine enemies whisper together against me; even against me do they imagine this evil.

Let the sentence of guiltiness proceed against him: And, now that he lieth, let him rise up no more.

How exactly does the turn of phrase here agree with that of the passage we have been now explaining!

They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.

Set thou an ungodly man to be Ruler over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand.

In both these passages the word *saying* is plainly understood, and, if added, the former would run thus :

*All mine enemies whisper together against me ;
against me do they imagine this evil, saying,*

*Let the sentence of guiltiness proceed against
him, &c.*

And so the latter would run thus :

*They have rewarded me evil for good, and
hatred for my love, saying,*

Set thou an ungodly man to be Ruler over him.

This would have made the passage, beyond all exception, clear, that the bad wishes, or curses, which follow for ten verses together, are thrown out by David's enemies against him :—As, indeed, the whole drift or tenor of the Psalm shews plainly that it must be so.

Here, then, begin the words of Shimei, (as I said) and the curses which he threw out against David :—

*Set thou an ungodly man to be Ruler over him,
and let Satan stand at his right hand.*

*When he shall be judged, let him be condemned;
and let his prayer become a sin.*

The following verses run in the same strain of the most severe and bitter imprecations, fit for the mouth of a Shimei, or his fellows, and for none else :

Let

Let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread: Let them seek it also in desolate places. Let the extortioner consume all that he hath; and let the stranger spoil his labour. Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion upon his fatherless children. Let his posterity be destroyed; and in the next generation let his name be clean put out. Let the wickedness of his fathers be had in remembrance in the sight of the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be done away. Let them alway be before the Lord, that He may root out the memorial of them from off the earth.

Thus far the words of Shimei, and the imprecations which he uttered against David.

The following part of the Psalm contains the words of David himself, and the reflections which he makes upon this bitter usage given him by his enemies.

And his first reflection is, that the curses which his enemies, and this one enemy, above all the rest, had cast upon him, would certainly return upon his own head:

Verse 16, *Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and helpless man, that he might even slay the broken in heart;*
(for

(for the cruelty of this bad usage of Shimei to him was greatly increased by the distressed condition David was now in, quite heart-broken, as it were, with Absalom's rebellion.)

As his delight was in cursing, so it shall come upon him: He loved not blessing, therefore shall it be far from him.

As he clothed himself with cursing as with a garment, so shall it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones.

It shall be unto him as the cloke that he bath upon him, and as the girdle that he is always girded withall.

This shall be the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord, and of them that speak evil against my soul.

It is easy to perceive how all this agrees with the behaviour of David's enemies towards him, and particularly that of Shimei in the curses which he uttered against him.

David then turns to God with a representation of the distress and misery of his condition, and devoutly prays that He would help him out of it:

But deal thou with me, O Lord God, according to thy name; for sweet is thy mercy.

O deliver me, for I am helpless and poor; and my heart is wounded within me. Wounded

(as

(as I observed before) by the rebellion of a son of whom he was extremely fond:—It follows, verse 23, *I am gone like the shadow, when it declineth: I am tossed up and down as the locust:—Driven from place to place before his enemies, like the locusts in a storm of wind:—My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh faileth of fatness.*

Here again is another circumstance which points us to David's flight from Absalom: For, as they fled through the wilderness, where there was no sustenance to be had, they must of necessity be exposed to great hunger and fasting. And so we find from 2 Sam. xvii. 29. where Barzillai and some other of his friends brought him meat and refreshments, *for they said, The people are hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness.*

David proceeds in the same lively description of his sufferings, verse 24.—

I became also a reproach unto them: They that looked upon me shook their heads.

Help me, O Lord my God: O save me according to thy mercy.

And they shall know that this is thy hand, and that thou Lord hast done it.

Though they curse, yet blest thou.

Still

Still we see his thoughts are taken up with those inhuman curses thrown out against him by his enemies.—The Hebrew is, *They shall curse, and thou shalt bless*: For David here begins to express his hope, or confidence, of God's mercy and his approaching deliverance. In the Book of Samuel (2 Sam. xvi. 12.) David says, *It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.*

But he expresses himself with more assurance:—*They shall curse, and thou shalt bless: They that rise up against me shall be confounded, and thy servant shall rejoice.*

My adversaries shall be clothed with shame, and shall cover themselves with their own confusion as with a cloke.

As for me, I will give great thanks unto the Lord with my mouth, and shall praise him among the multitude.

For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, (that is, the oppressed and injured) to save him from those that condemn his soul.—

Here (we see) instead of Satan, or the adversary standing at the right hand to accuse him, which was a part of the curse denounced against him by Shimei, David concludes with
a pious

a pious trust and hope that God would be at his right hand to deliver him.

I have thus (in as brief a manner as I could) gone through this remarkable Psalm,—and have shewn you how, in every particular, it agrees with the history told us (2 Sam. xvi.) of David's flying before Absalom, and his being pursued with the curses of Shimei, the son of Gera, the Benjamite.—And, as this appears, from the title, to be a Psalm of David, there is good reason to believe that it was written upon this occasion.—We see, from the beginning to the end, that the Psalmist's thoughts were full of the revilings and the curses that were thrown out by some adversary of his against him : And, in all his history, we do not read of any thing of this kind that was remarkable, besides the curses of this madman, Shimei.—The bitter imprecations, therefore, which we find recorded in this Psalm, we have reason to believe are his.—It is true that Shimei is not here named, nor is it usual with David in the Psalms to mention his adversaries by name : — But the characters sufficiently agree to him, and this is all that can be demanded.—It is true, moreover, that the words, which we suppose to be the words of Shimei, are introduced without any thing to denote the
person

person speaking :—But this, as I have shewn, is no uncommon thing upon the like occasion. It is plain they cannot be the words of David ; for David expressly condemns such cursing and imprecation in the words of my text :—They must belong to some other person therefore ; and to whom could they belong but to the mouth of the wicked, or the mouth of the deceitful, that were opened against him, as he tells us, ver. 2. And, as we know of no mouth that was ever opened against him with so much bitterness as that of Shimei, there is the greatest reason to ascribe it to him.

If it be asked, Why David should rehearse so much of the words of this wicked man in this Psalm, it may be answered, That he did it probably for the same reason that Hezekiah spread the letter of Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, before the Lord.—For, as the King of Assyria had therein reproached the living God, as if he were unable to save his people, Hezekiah, when he made his prayer to God, spread this letter also before Him, as a significant way of imploring Him to vindicate his own honour, and to save his worshippers.—And thus David, when he made his prayer to God in this Psalm, spreads before Him (as it were) the curses of Shimei and the unjust reproaches of

of his enemies, that God might have the more compassion on him, and deliver him the sooner out of his distress.—He seems, in short, to have the same thought here which he had expressed before, when the thing happened to him: *It may be, says he, that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.*

And thus I have gone through the first general head of this discourse, and have explained the Psalm before us.

I proceed, as I proposed, in the second place, to make some uses and improvement of what has been said.

And, first, it may be a caution to all, but more especially to those who are endued but with a moderate share of learning or understanding, to treat the Books of Scripture with a sacred reverence or respect:—Not to be too hasty in passing their judgment or censures upon passages which perhaps they do not understand, or to lay that as an objection to the Scriptures which may be intirely owing to their own mistakes.

Thus the Psalm before us may seem, at first sight, to have something in it that is very exceptionable:—And we may justly wonder to see so great a part of it run in the form of a
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curse or imprecation, when the Psalmist at the same time tells us, that they who delight in cursing shall be cursed : But, when duly explained, and set in its proper light, we see that this objection vanishes, and that the Psalm appears throughout consistent with itself.

It is, indeed, a great disadvantage to us in considering those Sacred Hymns, that (with regard to most of them) we know not the particular occasions upon which they were composed : — For this would render them more easy to be understood, and discover many excellencies to us which are now concealed. But, since we are destitute of these assistances, we are concerned to make the best use of those we have ; and, above all, to approach these Sacred Books with awe and reverence, with a lowly opinion of ourselves, and a deep sense of the infinite wisdom of Almighty God ; assuring ourselves that we shall never be able to fathom all the depths of these Sacred Writings. — We may see and understand enough of them, indeed, to make us wise unto salvation, if we make a right use of it : And, for the rest, we must content ourselves with that portion of light which God is pleased to give us, in the honest use of our abilities, and a sincere inquiry after truth. But men should beware of charging

charging any fault or blemish on the Scriptures themselves, when the fault may be in their own eye-sight, or in the wrong light wherein they regard them.

Secondly, From what has been said, we may perceive the folly, as well as impiety, of those who make use of those parts of the Psalms where any curses seem to be denounced for the expressing their own ill-will and rage against their enemies.—But this (sure) is abusing the Book of God to a very bad purpose, and can proceed from nothing but the grossest ignorance and mistake.—Should any one (for example) think himself warranted from this Psalm to curse his enemies in the same form of words that are here recorded, he ought to be told that he does not herein follow the example of David, nor yet rehearse the words of David, but the words of Shimei,—a wicked and ungodly wretch, of whom it is hard to say whether his malice or impiety were greater.

The words that properly express the sentiments of David are the words of my text; and it is an admirable lesson of instruction which they afford us,—That he who delights in cursing shall be cursed: And that he who loves

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not

not blessing shall be himself the farthest off from being blessed.

If there be any other part of the Book of Psalms wherein any curses are denounced, we are to remember that David was a Prophet, or inspired person, (and so were the others that composed the Psalms) and might therefore have a particular commission from God to denounce his judgments against obstinate and impenitent sinners, or against the enemies of God and religion, whom, in his just displeasure, and for their wickedness, which he perceived to be incorrigible, he had sentenced to destruction: But this (sure) can warrant no man, who is not himself a Prophet sent from God, to take upon him the same authority, and to denounce the same, or the like sentences against others.

The Book of Psalms, therefore, (like all other books) ought to be read and used with judgment and discretion;—and the truly sensible and pious Christian, who makes use of it as a help to his devotions (as it is an admirable help, if rightly used) will take care to lay it down, as a rule to himself, to understand in a spiritual sense what would be wrong, if understood in the literal. Where he meets with any judgments denounced by the Prophets

phets against the enemies of God, he will beware of applying them to those with whom he is at enmity himself; for neither justice nor charity can allow this; but he will do well to reflect how wretched is the condition of that man who hath made God his enemy:—He will consider, moreover, that his greatest enemies, in reality, are his spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil; and against these he may express his zeal and indignation, as much as he pleases, against the wiles of Satan, and the ways of sin, and every thing that indangers his salvation.—Of these he cannot have too great an abhorrence:—But let him remember, that amongst these there can be none more dangerous than a spirit of uncharitableness, of ill-will, or hatred towards others.

A third use or improvement I would take leave to make of this discourse is with regard to the Psalms that are sung in the Church: There ought to be some care had, and some discretion used, in the choice of them; and the more so, because it is but a small part of a Psalm, but three or four verses at the most, that is usually sung at a time:—Now, though the whole Psalm together may be an admirable composition, very pious and instructive;

yet it is possible to pick out a verse or two, here and there, which, when disjointed from the others, may carry a very ill sound or sense with them, and be no way fit for a congregation to rehearse, and to make their own by fingering it.

Thus, for example, the Psalm before us, when we consider it from the beginning to the end, and take the whole design of it together, is very useful and instructive: But, were any one to pick out three or four verses by themselves, of those which I call the words of Shimei, for a congregation to rehearse or sing, he would put into their mouths such imprecations as are no way fit for a Christian to utter, and such as, if uttered with the same ill-will or malice against any one as Shimei uttered them against David, must needs involve them in a like degree of guilt.

And this shews an apparent difference betwixt the use of the reading Psalms (as we call them) and those in metre, or those that are sung in the public service of the Church.—As to the reading Psalms, we read them all without distinction, as they come in order in our daily service:—But then it is to be considered, that we read the Psalm throughout,—(I mean all except the cxixth, which is divided,

ded, however, into proper portions) and by thus reading the whole Psalm together we see its true design and the connection which one part of it has with the other. But in the singing Psalms it is otherwise:—A verse or two is taken and no more: And, unless this, therefore, be chosen with judgment, it may neither express the sense of the Psalmist, nor yet put into the minds of those that sing or hear it proper thoughts, such as become the solemnity of the place, and the design for which we meet together in the House of God.

We come here to celebrate the praises of our Maker; to confess and to deplore our sins; to beg God's grace and mercy for ourselves and others.—Towards these, and the like good purposes, there are admirable helps to be found in the Book of Psalms.

But, if, instead of serving these good ends, men pick out such passages as may express their own private passions and resentments, or any thing foreign to the true design of God's public worship, they must be guilty of a great abuse of this Sacred Book.

It is, therefore, of some moment (as I said) to make a proper choice with regard to those portions of the Psalms which are to be sung: And the most proper for a public congrega-

tion are those that run in the most general terms,—where the wisdom of God is celebrated, his power and justice are displayed, his infinite mercy and goodness shewn towards the sons of men; or such as may express our hope and trust in God, our sorrow for our sins, our resolutions of a better life, our earnest desires of God's grace and assistance to this purpose, and our thanksgivings to him for all the mercies we have received.

In short, as the design of all our prayers and praises is to awake our piety to God and charity to men, and to cultivate and improve every good disposition in us; it is this that should direct the choice, as in the present case, where a liberty of chusing is indulged.—And this shall suffice for the third use proper to be made of this discourse.

A fourth use that may be made of the subject now before us is to give us a right notion of our Ash-wednesday Commination, as it is called; and to take off the objections which some have urged against it through their own mistake.

I have observed that it is usual in the Old Testament for the Prophets to denounce the judgments of Almighty God against obstinate and impenitent sinners.—This has not the nature

ture of a curse, (properly speaking) for there are no bad wishes in it. The design is, in reality, charitable and good, either to reclaim those sinners themselves by alarming them with their danger, or to deter others from the like practices by the punishments denounced against them.

It is remarkable that the blessings and the curses (as they are called) of the Law of Moses, that is, the rewards promised to their obedience, and the punishments threatened to their disobedience, were to be pronounced to the people in a public and solemn manner, standing on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Six of the tribes of Israel (as we learn from Deut. xxvii.) were to stand upon or along the sides of the one hill, and six along the other:—And the Priests and the Levites, standing with the ark below and between both, were, with a loud voice, commanded to pronounce the blessings towards one side, and the curses towards the other; and all the people were required to express their assent to both by answering and saying Amen. This, no doubt, had a very wise and merciful design in it, that the hearts of the people, being hereby touched with a due sense of their happiness in keeping of the Law of God, and the great danger of

transgressing it, they might be the more confirmed in their obedience, or, if guilty of any breaches of the Law, might be timely led to repentance.

And the very same is the design of our Ash-wednesday Commination, that is, threatening, or *denouncing God's anger and judgment against sinners*, as it is called in the title of that office :—For these sentences of Scripture, which denounce God's vengeance against the more flagrant and notorious sins, are here read in a public and solemn manner ; and the people are required to express their assent to it by saying Amen to every sentence,—that, being hereby *admonished* (as our Church expresses it) *of the great indignation of God against sinners, they may be moved to earnest and true repentance, and may walk more warily in those dangerous days, fleeing from such vices for which they affirm with their own mouths the curse of God to be due.*—

For this (it ought carefully to be observed) is all that is here done.—It is affirmed, that the curse of God is due to such and such sins : And this in the very words of Scripture, Deut. xxvii. *Cursed is the man that maketh a carved image to worship it.—Cursed is he that curseth his father and mother.* And so on.

So

So weak is the objection that some make against this office, as if it were a *curfing* or *wifhing ill* to the offenders here fspoken of:—Whereas there is in reality no *wifh* at all in the matter:—It is only *affirming* a thing which is true in itfelf, and will for ever be fo, whether we affirm it or not, viz. that God's curfe lies upon thofe who are guilty of fuch or fuch notorious fins. And this we may be fure of;—for the Word of Truth itfelf hath fspoken it.

The laft ufe or inference I fhall mention, proper to be made of this difcourfe, is this:—It may fhew us the great excellency and neceffity of a truly charitable difpofition,—the wifhing well to others, which is here called bleffing them, and heartily defiring and endeavouring their good and welfare, as we have opportunity and ability.

This (it is certain) is the very temper and fpirit of Chriftianity:—*By this fhall all men know that ye are my difciples*, fays the Bleffed Jefus, *if ye have love one to another*. Nay, it is a temper the moft becoming us as men, the greateft ornament and improvement of human nature, and is therefore called humanity: And, if they who delight in curfing fhall be curfed, we have reafon to conclude on the other hand that they who delight in bleffing fhall be bleffed:

blest: Blessed in the enjoyment of themselves and of all that satisfaction which naturally arises from such a benevolent temper and disposition; blest in the love and the esteem of others, so justly due to this good quality more especially:—In a word, blest in the favour of Almighty God here, and for ever blest and happy in the world to come,—through the merits of our only Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

To whom, with, &c.

N. B. This sermon was first preached at St. Mabyn's, Cornwall, Oct. 2, 1748, (as I see noted by the Author on the back of the MS.) which was about seven years before Dr. Sykes published his book on the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he takes notice of this Psalm. Had the Author lived to have completed his work on the Psalms, (which Divine Hymns had been his favourite study for many years) it was his intention to have published this sermon as an explanation of this Psalm.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVIII.

Job xxviii. 28.

And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

THE fear of the Lord is a phrase by which the Holy Scriptures frequently express unto us the whole of religion and our duty,—it being from this principle, well fixed and rooted in the heart, that men are inclined to worship God, and to discharge their duty, and to regulate the whole course of their lives by the rules and precepts he hath set them.—

And this my text assures us is wisdom,—the best and highest wisdom,—and that which, by way of eminence, and beyond comparison with any other that is called so amongst men, deserves this great and envied title.

But because this is a truth which all men do not so readily perceive, or are not willing
to

to acknowledge;—because a great part of mankind, indeed, if one may guess by their behaviour, seem to be in possession of quite other notions, and are inclined to think themselves very wise, if they can be wise enough for this world;—and to look upon religion and the fear of God as little better than folly,—a mere dream of melancholy men, without any certain foundation;—therefore it may not be unnecessary or improper to inquire a little into the grounds of that assertion in my text, as well to vindicate a religious practice from the imputation which the giddy and unthinking sort are too apt to throw upon it, as to convince those who despise and neglect it that this their way is folly,—and thereby engage them (if possible) to think of growing wiser and better.

But, first, I shall observe one or two things briefly from the text,—and then proceed to consider the main point contained in it.

First, then, when we find, in this and so many other places of Holy Scripture, the fear of God put to express the whole of our duty, and so many good things said of it, one may justly suspect the truth of what some men, with too much boldness, have advanced, as if that obedience which proceeds from a principle

ciple of fear were altogether to be condemned, and will be of no account in the sight of God:—Surely, if the fear of the Lord be wisdom, the reasoning of those men must be folly.

Perfect love (says St. John) casteth out fear:—What,—the fear of God? God forbid:—No: But the fear of man,—the fear of any evils they were like to suffer for the profession of the Christian faith;—and, besides this, it casts out every anxious and tormenting fear, such as is apt to disturb the breasts and consciences of wicked men,—because fear hath torment, as the Apostle adds:—But the love of God does by no means free men, or even excuse them, from that awful and reverential fear which is due to God, as the great Law-giver and Judge of the world.—Our Blessed Lord himself not only allows but even commands us to fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell,—and for this very reason (to be sure) because He is able to do so:—And we should never see so many threatenings interspersed throughout the Sacred Writings, which can have no other aim but to work upon the fears of men, if at the same time men ought not to be influenced by their fears in the performance of their duty,—or were it possible they could so well discharge
their

their duty without it: For let not the most perfect Christian be over-confident that he may not be reduced to such a strait, to such an exigence of temptation, as to be beholden to his fears alone, if he continue innocent.

And, therefore, these refiners in divinity must first refine human nature too, and make it other than it is, if they expect their doctrines should become current.

More might be added upon this subject,—but my intention was but just to mention it:—And this, because some good and pious Christians have been led by this mistaken notion into very perplexing doubts concerning the sincerity and acceptableness of their obedience to the Laws of God, as if to do their duty, either from the hope of a reward, or else from fear of God's displeasure, were but a low and mercenary thing, and that they were obliged to I know not what flight of disinterested service and obedience, which, to those who rightly consider the frame of our natures, must appear to be impracticable,—and in those who pretend to it, therefore, can be nothing but mere vaunt and delusion.—

It may serve to give one a farther dislike of this notion (and it is the other reason why I have mentioned it) to consider, that the Gentle-

men of irreligious principles seem of late to give into it, and to make it their boast:—They, good men, discharge their duty, and are virtuous, (if you will believe them) without the least hope or fear of any thing to come hereafter.—But can we think these Gentlemen are in earnest?—Or, rather, do they mean it as a banter upon those who, by aiming at a perfection which God does no-where require, and carrying religion, which is every man's duty, to a height which no man can attain to, instead of advancing it hereby, do in reality but degrade and expose it?

A second observation I shall take leave to raise is this:—That religion is described to us in my text, and so it is in other places of Holy Scripture, by such expressions as plainly suppose it to be something practical: That it consists not merely in a set of notions and opinions which may possess the head without touching the heart,—but that it is something which sways and influences the affections, and flows out into action, and gives life and grace, consistency, and regularity to the behaviour.

For (sure) the fear of the Lord, to which the character of wisdom is here applied, must be supposed to shew itself in the happy fruits of a well-ordered, pious, prudent, upright conduct;

conduct; without which a man may be knowing, he may be learned;—but he can never, without the greatest abuse and impropriety of speech, be said to be either religious or wise.

It is true, religion is sometimes expressed in Holy Scripture by the terms of knowledge, faith, and such other phrases as may seem at first glance to import rather something speculative than practical:—But, perhaps, a closer attention to the idiom of the Scripture language may convince us that it is otherwise:—To know God, in the phrase of Holy Scripture, being plainly to acknowledge Him as God, which implies a due obedience to his commands.—And faith, which has so many great things said of it in the New Testament, seems in the very notion of it to include fidelity, or a strict adherence to the religion of our Blessed Saviour, both in principle and practice:—And, indeed, without this last—I mean a suitable practice and behaviour,—the Gospel is very clear, that, though a man had all faith, so as to remove mountains,—it shall signify nothing to him in the day of Judgment, unless he could thereby call the mountains to cover him, and to hide him from the wrath of God.

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The fear of the Lord, then, (which is the great duty recommended in my text) must be supposed to mean such a religious awe and reverence of the Divine Majesty, such a prevailing sense of God upon our minds, as will effectually incline us to obey Him in the course and conduct of our lives. The fear of the Lord (as the Scripture elsewhere tells us) is to depart from evil: It is then alone a right temper of heart, a disposition truly acceptable in the sight of God, when it effectually excites us to renounce the ways of sin, and to abound in all the graces and virtues of a holy life. And this, indeed, is wisdom, the best and truest wisdom, and far beyond any other that is called so amongst men,—which I come now to make appear more fully under the

Second general head of this discourse,—*Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.*

That is wisdom which the wisest men agree in and pronounce to be so.

That is wisdom which all our observation and experience of the world most evidently confirms to be so.

That is wisdom which, in every state and condition of life, and in all occurrences whatever, makes a man satisfied with himself, and

of which no man ever yet found reason to repent.

Lastly, That is wisdom which, in the final issue and event of things, will most certainly appear to be so.

And, in all these respects, I doubt not but it will appear, upon a thorough examination, that the fear of the Lord is the best and truest wisdom.

1st, That is wisdom which the wisest men agree in, and pronounce to be so.—And this, surely, can admit of no dispute:—For what wise men generally agree in he would be no very wise man that should presume to call in question.

Now that the wisest men in all ages have agreed to recommend a life of religion and virtue, expressed in my text by the fear of God, and departing from evil, as the highest point of wisdom, is a fact too plain to be denied.—

The Author of this Book of Job (whoever he was) setting aside his authority as an inspired Writer, must certainly appear to those that read it carefully to have been a very wise man:—And the whole history contained in it is no other than a proof or confirmation of that assertion he has laid down in my text, that *the fear of the Lord is wisdom.*

The Books of Solomon run so much in this strain, that wisdom and folly are but other names with him for religion and its contrary, viz. irreligion and vice:—And we must allow him to have been the better judge in this case, because he builds his conclusion upon a long course of observation and experience;—and, after he had sought for happiness in vain amongst all the variety of real or imaginary pleasures that this world could afford him, he pronounces all to be vanity and vexation of spirit beside fearing God and keeping his commandments: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, (says he) fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty or concern of man.

Even in the dark times of Heathenism, we find the best and wisest of the Philosophers always engaged on the side of religion, diligently inculcating the fear and worship of the Deity, according to that imperfect light and knowledge of Him which they could attain to by the force of reason; and pressing upon men the practice of all moral duties:—Such were, particularly, Socrates, and Plato, and Pythagoras;—names well known and celebrated in the learned world.—And the little Philosophers of the other side, who, for the sake of being singular, studied to broach

new schemes of atheism and impiety, came as far behind these in wisdom and knowledge as they did in goodness.—So true was that observation of my Lord Bacon *, even then, as it has been found so by experience ever since, —That a little smattering in philosophy, where it meets with a weak and shallow judgment, is apt to incline a man to infidelity and a contempt of religion ; but a deep and thorough insight into things is a certain cure for it again, and makes men more religious, in proportion as it makes them more knowing and wise.

They, who have made the most diligent search and inquiries into the nature of things, are struck with wonder and astonishment at the vast extent, the regular order, the just harmony and contrivance of the world :—They see, in every plant and every living creature, plain marks of the infinite wisdom, power, and goodness of Almighty God,—and, touched with sentiments of piety and religion, are ready to cry out with the Psalmist, *O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! In wisdom hast thou made them all : The earth is full of thy goodness.*—

* Verum est tamen parum Philosophiæ naturalis homines inclinare in Atheismum, et altiore scientiam eos ad religionem circumagere. Lord Bacon, Sermones fideles, c. xvi. p. 75. And he gives the reason of it just after.—

They

They who study the motions of the heavenly bodies, consider the course and order of the stars, their vast distances, and use in measuring out to us the vicissitudes of night and day, and times and seasons, in a constant and regular manner, the farther they proceed in their inquiries, the more effectually are they convinced of the truth of the good Psalmist's observation, that *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work.*—

As they who are conversant in the study of nature cannot but see Almighty God in his works, so they who are best read in the history of the world see Him almost as clearly in the ways of his Providence:—And one may venture to say there never was a good Historian but appears in his writings to shew a sense of religion. In short, there is hardly any part of learning but, if rightly used, will lead a man to the knowledge of God, and incline him so much the more to worship and adore Him:—And therefore we need not wonder that the most learned and knowing part of mankind (except here and there one or two in an age, perhaps, that affected to be singular and to contradict the rest of the world) have always declared in favour of religion, and have

esteemed the fear of God, and the practice of virtue and goodness, to be the best and truest wisdom.

I shall only add, that, as religion has ever had the approbation of the wisest men, so it has generally that of others too in their wisest intervals,—I mean in their cool deliberate moments, when they are most masters of their reason, and their thoughts unclouded with any irregular appetite or passion:—For, as it is generally a want of consideration, or the violence of some unruly lust or passion, that betrays men into a contempt and transgression of the laws of God, so, when they return to a right mind, and have time to think and to consider, they soon perceive the folly of their former conduct, and wish they had done better.—And hence it is that even the generality of those that go on in a course of sin do nevertheless esteem virtue and religion, or the fear of God, and the keeping his commandments, to be the best and wisest course:—Their practice contradicts their better reason and judgment, and in their thoughts they cannot but approve of what is good, though they are hurried on by the violence of their lusts and passions to that which is evil.

But

But thus much shall suffice for my first head, viz. That the wisest men, and, indeed, all men in their wiser intervals, when they give themselves the opportunity of serious thought and reflection, have been ever ready to acknowledge, that the fear of God, and the practice of virtue and religion, is the best and truest wisdom.—

But, 2dly, that is wisdom which all our observation and experience of the world does evidently confirm to be so.

For, as experience has been always reckoned the best mistress, and best guide to truth, whatsoever comes thus proved and recommended to us for wisdom ought in all reason to be allowed to be so:—And this, upon a fair and equal computation, we shall find to be on the side of religion,—there being very few who have lived long enough to make their observation on the course of things in this world, but by seeing the vanity and strange delusoriness of every thing besides, are convinced at length, upon experience, (if they refused to be convinced before) of the truth of that assertion of the Wise Man, That to fear God, and to keep his commandments, is, indeed, the great concern, the wisdom and happiness of man.—

Indeed, the Book of Ecclesiastes is no other than a demonstration of the wisdom of a religious life from observation and experience of the world.—The main drift and design of King Solomon in that Book is a diligent search and inquiry after happiness:—And, upon a full examination of the point, he concludes, that it is no-where to be found but in the ways of religion:—*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter,* (says he) *Fear God, and keep his commandments: For this is the whole duty or concern of man.*—And let any one but read that just description of human things which he hath given us in that Book, and then let him deny his conclusion, if he can.

A very little experience of the world will convince us of the uncertainty of all things here below;—that there is nothing we can promise ourselves a long or a secure enjoyment of, and that our life itself depends upon such a weak and slender thread, that the least violence, or accident, may cut it off, and we are gone;—and, therefore, how sure are we of a disappointment, if we seek our happiness in this world? Whereas to aim at a happiness beyond the present life, and to seek it in the ways of virtue and religion, is such a wise and prudent course as can never fail us.—All
other

other things besides are liable to such uncertainty, that what men eagerly endeavour after they are not sure to compass: And, though they should attain to all they wish, yet they seldom find that pleasure and satisfaction, in the possession of it, which they promised themselves before in the expectation.—But the happiness of the other life shall exceed our utmost expectations; is far greater than we can now conceive; and is liable to no such hazard or disappointment, but is certain as the Word of God can make it: For, if we have our fruit unto holiness, we are sure the end shall be everlasting life.

But thus much for the second head,—That is wisdom which all our observation and experience of the world does evidently confirm to be so.

Thirdly, That is wisdom which, in all occurrences whatever, and in every state of life, makes a man satisfied with himself, and of which no man ever yet found reason to repent.—

And this, too, is the peculiar privilege of a virtuous and religious course of life.—A course of sin and wickedness is generally followed with uneasiness and remorse, and with bitter horrors and misgivings of mind.—It must be so,

so, if men give themselves the leisure to think at all, and have not quite renounced their reason, together with their innocence:—For, as he who lives in the practice of any vice, unless he has greatly depraved his understanding, must be conscious to himself that he does so, and must know, moreover, that the wrath of God is revealed in Holy Scripture against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, how is it possible for him, if he thinks at all, to be easy or composed under these reflections?—

But, now, who ever saw reason to repent or be uneasy, because he had discharged his duty? Because he had made it his great care and endeavour to live in the fear of God and a diligent observance of his commands? This is so far from creating any uneasiness upon reflection, that, on the contrary, it is the foundation of the most solid joy and comfort, and fills a man with that peace of mind, that peace of God, which far surpasses all understanding. —In the day of prosperity, when every thing goes well without us, this inward peace will add a relish to our other enjoyments, and be itself the greatest of them all:—And, in the time of adversity, when any outward evils overtake us, nothing but this will afford a solid and substantial refuge and support to us; and this

this (if any thing) will:—*Our rejoicing is this*, (says St. Paul, at the same time that he was compassed about, as it were, with a cloud of troubles and afflictions) *our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*—This, indeed, is capable to give ease and rest to a man's mind in all occurrences whatever,—will stand him in the greatest stead, when all other comforts fail him;—and will be his great support and consolation in the hour of death, and in the day of Judgment.

And therefore, fourthly and lastly,—That is wisdom which, in the final issue and event of things, will most certainly appear to be so.—That must needs be the wisest course a man can take, which not only tends to bring him peace and satisfaction for the present, but secures to him a portion of happiness hereafter, and that the most complete and lasting happiness, even for ever and ever.—

A truly wise man never contents himself just to look at what is present or before him, but considers the ends and consequences of things, compares the present with the future, and weighs them both together, before he proceeds to any resolution or action, and more especially

especially in matters of importance : Because otherwise, for the sake of little present advantage, he might be apt to draw upon himself very great and lasting mischiefs :—And thus it often happens with those who want this common prudence or foresight, who are too mindful of the present and too negligent of the future.—

But, now, here is the wisdom of a religious life, that, whatsoever the present either advantages or disadvantages of it may be, yet we are sure the end and consequence of it must be happy :—It delivers us from the greatest evils in future, and secures to us a crown of never-fading glory.—Whereas the contrary must inevitably be the fruit and consequence of a vicious course :—It cuts men off from all hope and expectation of any future happiness, and delivers them over to the dreadfulest, most intolerable miseries.—

And who, then, can deny but that a wicked life is an argument of the greatest madness and folly ?—

When we consider the fear of God and the practice of our duty in this light, and compare it with its contrary, ungodliness and vice ;—when we reflect on the blessed reward of the one, and the sad ways of the other ; we
must

must be lost (sure) to all sense of good and evil, if we are not fully convinced of the truth of that assertion in my text, that *the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.*

Let us then (that I may close up all with a brief application) let us resolve to be wise and to be happy:—Let us fear the Lord, and depart from evil:—Let it be our first and main concern to secure the favour of that God who is able to punish and reward us everlastingly.—

If the authority of the wisest men has any influence to persuade us,—if our observation and experience of the vanity of every thing besides in this world has any power to convince us,—if the peace and satisfaction of our own minds be of any value or account with us,—or the eternal interests of our souls, their everlasting happiness in the life to come, can move us,—let us, for the sake of all these, be persuaded to seek this best and truest wisdom;—let us be wise to all the purposes of an holy life;—let us be wise unto salvation.

This is that wisdom wherein we may all of us, even the meanest Christians amongst us may excel, if they please.—To be wise or skilful in other matters may perhaps exceed the reach or capacity of some:—But there is
none

none but may attain that wisdom in my text, to fear God and to depart from evil, if so be they will but use their best endeavours, and implore the Divine grace to succour and assist them:—For, if any man *lack wisdom*, (says St. James, Ja. i. 5.) *let him ask of God, who giveth to every man liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*—But let him ask in faith,—as the Apostle presently adds;—or as becomes a Christian, in the name of Christ, through whom alone it is that every blessing is conveyed down to us,—*for no man cometh to the Father but by Him.*

Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, (says Christ to his disciples) *He will give it you;*—that is, whatever is fit and proper to be asked, and more especially all that grace or assistance of his Holy Spirit which is necessary to the performance of your duty.—

If, therefore, there be any here present who have hitherto gone on in any course of sin, let me exhort them to grow wise in season and repent: Let them no longer suffer themselves to be deluded with the false pleasures of vice, which generally draw after them their share of misery and vexation, even in this life; and, in the life to come, must end in bitterness and sorrows everlasting: But, having made their
peace

peace with God, through the merits of their Blessed Saviour, by an hearty renouncing and forsaking all their sins, let them stedfastly resolve upon a new and better course of life for the time to come, and still go on and persevere in well-doing, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

So will you reap the comfort and satisfaction of a peaceful conscience here, which is more to be valued than all beside that this world can afford you :—So shall ye enjoy the inexpressible reward of it hereafter,—in that great day of trial and retribution, when there shall be an everlasting distinction put betwixt the righteous and the wicked, betwixt him that feareth God and him that feareth Him not :—And the wisdom of one course, and the folly of the other, shall be made apparent and visible to all the world,—when, as a just punishment of their wilful folly and perverseness, the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all they that forget God : And, as a reward of their former faith, and piety, and obedience, the wise shall shine forth as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever.—

S E R M O N XIX.

Romans v. 1.

*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace
with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

IT is the observation of St. Peter concerning the Epistles of St. Paul, that in them are some things hard to be understood, which they who are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction, 2 Peter iii. 16.

And, amongst these difficult places of St. Paul's Epistles, there is none that has been more mistaken than where he treats of the doctrine of justification by faith: Hence it is that there have risen many disputes and controversies in the Christian Church concerning this doctrine.

Even in the times of the Apostles we read of some who had so far wrested these discourses of St. Paul, as, from thence, to encourage themselves in all manner of wickedness,—
presumptuously

presumptuously affirming, that their faith alone should save them, let their lives be never so bad or vicious.—Against these it is St. James argues, in the second chapter of his Epistle, —wherein he professedly treats of the doctrine of justification, and sets himself to confute those dangerous notions some had entertained from a wrong construction of St. Paul's meaning,—by shewing the obligation that lies upon all Christians to good works as well as faith,—and the necessity of an holy life in order to salvation.

Since, therefore, no point of Christianity has been more mistaken than the doctrine now before us,—it may not be amiss to inquire into the true intent and meaning of it, and to shew in what sense it is that we are said to be justified by faith:—*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

For the right understanding of which words, I shall lay down the following plain method of discourse:

1. To inquire what is here meant by being justified?—
2. What that faith is by which we are said to be justified?—
3. How it is we are justified through our Lord Jesus Christ?

D d

4. And,

4. And, last of all, what that peace with God is which is here said to be the happy fruit or effect of this justification?

A satisfactory answer to these four inquiries will (I presume) be sufficient to give us a full and clear notion of the doctrine contained in my text.

1st, Then, let us inquire what it is (in the sense of the Apostle) to be justified?—

Now whoever considers carefully the drift and tenor of St. Paul's discourses will find his notion of justification to be plainly this:—That to be justified is to be freely pardoned and absolved from the guilt of our past sins, and, as the consequence of this, to be taken into the grace and favour of Almighty God. That this is what the Apostle means by being justified will soon appear, if we consider the arguments which the Apostle uses to convince both Jews and Gentiles of the necessity which they lay under of being justified by faith, and by the grace and mercy offered to them in the Gospel.

To make them sensible of this, he shews that all mankind were sinners;—that both Jews and Gentiles had transgressed the Law of God, and were therefore liable to punishment for their transgression:—That by the Law no man could be justified;—neither the

Gentiles by the Law of Nature, nor the Jews by the Law of Moses : Because the Law only denounced a penalty against sin, but made no sufficient provision for the pardon of it.—That therefore, as all had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, (Rom. iii. 23.) there was a necessity of their having recourse to God's free grace and mercy, which was now offered them through the redemption which was in Christ Jesus.

This being the plain drift of the Apostle's reasoning in this place, it is manifest, that to be justified in the Apostle's sense is only to be acquitted or absolved from the guilt of our past sins, and, as the consequence of this, to be taken into favour and reconciliation with Almighty God.

Proceed we to the second thing proposed, which is to inquire what that faith is by which we are said to be justified?—

And to this it may be answered briefly,—That by faith is not meant any one particular branch of faith, but the Christian faith in general,—or such a firm and hearty persuasion of the truth of our religion as shall be effectual to the reformation of our hearts and lives : —So that, when the Apostle says we are justified by faith, it is the same as if he had said

4. And, last of all, what that peace with God is which is here said to be the happy fruit or effect of this justification?

A satisfactory answer to these four inquiries will (I presume) be sufficient to give us a full and clear notion of the doctrine contained in my text.

1st, Then, let us inquire what it is (in the sense of the Apostle) to be justified?—

Now whoever considers carefully the drift and tenor of St. Paul's discourses will find his notion of justification to be plainly this:—That to be justified is to be freely pardoned and absolved from the guilt of our past sins, and, as the consequence of this, to be taken into the grace and favour of Almighty God. That this is what the Apostle means by being justified will soon appear, if we consider the arguments which the Apostle uses to convince both Jews and Gentiles of the necessity which they lay under of being justified by faith, and by the grace and mercy offered to them in the Gospel.

To make them sensible of this, he shews that all mankind were sinners;—that both Jews and Gentiles had transgressed the Law of God, and were therefore liable to punishment for their transgression:—That by the Law no man could be justified;—neither the

Gentiles by the Law of Nature, nor the Jews by the Law of Moses : Because the Law only denounced a penalty against sin, but made no sufficient provision for the pardon of it.—That therefore, as all had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, (Rom. iii. 23.) there was a necessity of their having recourse to God's free grace and mercy, which was now offered them through the redemption which was in Christ Jesus.

This being the plain drift of the Apostle's reasoning in this place, it is manifest, that to be justified in the Apostle's sense is only to be acquitted or absolved from the guilt of our past sins, and, as the consequence of this, to be taken into favour and reconciliation with Almighty God.

Proceed we to the second thing proposed, which is to inquire what that faith is by which we are said to be justified?—

And to this it may be answered briefly,—That by faith is not meant any one particular branch of faith, but the Christian faith in general,—or such a firm and hearty persuasion of the truth of our religion as shall be effectual to the reformation of our hearts and lives : —So that, when the Apostle says we are justified by faith, it is the same as if he had said

we are intitled to the pardon of our sins, and are taken into grace and favour with Almighty God by our embracing of the Christian faith, by our becoming true and sincere Christians.—

And that this is what the Apostle means by justifying faith will appear plain by considering the opposition which he carries on betwixt faith and the Law, i. e. the Christian faith and the Law of Moses, or the Old Testament and the New.—Thus, Gal. iii. 23. *Before faith came, says he, we were kept under the Law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed,—i. e. before the Christian faith was published, we (says St. Paul speaking of himself as a Jew, and the rest of his brethren) were kept under the Law of Moses, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. And again, Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith,—i. e. the Law of Moses was a sort of discipline preparatory to the Gospel:—The Old Testament, or the Law of Moses, with all its types and prophecies, being only shadows of good things to come, designed chiefly to prepare the world for the reception of Christianity:—Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith;*

faith, i. e. by embracing Christianity.—He proceeds: *But after that faith is come* (after the Christian faith was published) *we are no longer under a schoolmaster* (no longer under the discipline of the Law) *for we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*,—i. e. by embracing the Christian faith, by becoming true and sincere Christians.

Nothing can be plainer than that by faith, in this place, we are to understand the Christian faith in general,—and that in opposition to the Jewish dispensation, or the Law of Moses:—So that, when the Apostle says, *We are justified by faith*, and, elsewhere, *by faith without the deeds of the Law*, his meaning can be only this,—that we are justified by the Christian faith, or religion, without the observation of the Jewish Law.—

But, for a more particular account wherein the nature of this justifying faith consists, and how much is implied and comprehended under it, it may not be amiss to consider it under the following heads or branches.

First, It implies an acknowledging the Blessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, who was sent into the world for the salvation of mankind.

Secondly, A belief of all those things which are revealed and taught us in the Gospel.

Thirdly, A reliance on the merits of Christ for our pardon and salvation.—

Fourthly, and last of all,—A serious and effectual resolution to obey the precepts of the Gospel, and to lead a truly Christian life.

That every one of these particulars is included in the notion of a justifying faith,—is what I shall endeavour to make appear by considering each of them distinctly.

As, 1st, it implies an acknowledging our Blessed Saviour to be the Christ, the Son of God, who was sent into the world for the salvation of mankind.

And of this, I presume, there needs but little proof,—it being the great fundamental point of our religion, without acknowledging whereof a man can in no sense whatever be called a Christian.

The great design of our Saviour's miracles was to convince the world that He was the Christ, or the Messiah, whom the Prophets had so long foretold, and in whom mankind were to expect salvation :—And this was what the Apostles always preached and taught.—The chief end of all their preaching was to bring mankind to the acknowledgment of this truth,

truth,—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God:—Nay the Holy Scriptures themselves, as the Evangelist St. John acquaints us, were written to this intent and purpose, *That we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing we may have life through his name,* John xx. 31.

This, then, is the first thing implied in a truly Christian or justifying faith,—our acknowledging the Blessed Jesus for the true Messiah, or the Christ, the Son of God, and Saviour of the world.

Again, 2dly, And, as the consequence of this, it implies a firm belief of all those truths or doctrines which He hath revealed and taught us in the Gospel.

And this is what naturally follows from the foregoing consideration:—For, if we own our Blessed Saviour's character,—if we look upon Him as a person sent from God to shew mankind the way of salvation,—it necessarily follows that we are obliged to believe whatsoever He himself, or his Apostles, who were divinely inspired and commissioned by Him, have any where revealed and taught us in the Scriptures.

And more especially all those great and fundamental points which we call articles of faith,

—such as are more immediately necessary to be believed in order to salvation.

Another thing, implied in a truly Christian or justifying faith, is a reliance on our Saviour's merits for our pardon and salvation.—

For it is plain from Holy Scripture, that the ground of all that mercy which is offered to us in the Gospel is laid in what our Saviour did and suffered for us: And more especially in that last great act of his, when he became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross,—and gave his life as a sacrifice for our redemption.—Hence it is that He is so often said to be the propitiation for our sins,—to have purchased or redeemed us with his blood;—to have suffered for sin, the just for the unjust,—and to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself:—Expressions plainly intimating to us, that it is through Him alone, and for the sake of his meritorious sufferings and death, that God has declared himself ready to be reconciled to sinners, to forgive their past offences, and to admit them to a covenant of mercy and salvation upon the terms and conditions of the Gospel.

And hence it becomes the duty of a Christian to rely on the merits of his Saviour, after all his best endeavours in the ways of piety;

piety; to hope remission of his sins through his most precious blood: And, in a word, to ascribe the whole of his salvation to the grace and mercy of Almighty God,—who, when mankind had fallen from their obedience, and were become liable to eternal death and misery, was pleased to send his Holy Son into the world to die for our redemption, and to put us in the way of everlasting happiness.

And, besides all this which I have mentioned, the owning of our Blessed Saviour's character, believing of his doctrines, relying on his merits, there is one thing more implied in a truly Christian or justifying faith, and that is a serious and effectual resolution to obey the precepts of the Gospel, and to lead a truly Christian life.

And this is so very necessary to the perfecting our faith, and rendering it effectual to our justification and salvation, that without it all the faith in the world can signify nothing to us:—*Why call ye me Lord, Lord, says Christ himself, and do not the things which I say?* What can it avail us to believe in Christ, and to own Him for the Saviour of the world, if at the same time we live in a continued disobedience to his commands, and wilfully neglect, despise, and frustrate all the means of our salvation?

tion? For of such as these our Blessed Lord himself hath told us very plainly, that He will disown them at the day of Judgment, and send them from his presence with that just rebuke, *Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* Matt. vii. 23.

The great end for which our Saviour came into the world was not only to redeem us from the guilt of sin, but to free us likewise from the power and dominion of it.—And hence it is that whosoever would embrace the Christian faith was immediately commanded to repent of his sins, and, for the time to come, to walk in newness of life :—And this was so expressly required as the condition of eternal happiness, that whosoever was not thus converted (our Saviour assures us) should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven, Matt. xviii. 3.

It would be endless to reckon up all the texts of Scripture to this purpose, since the Scriptures every-where almost inculcate this great truth, and shew us the necessity of an holy life in order to salvation :—And, therefore, when the Apostle tells us that we are justified by faith, we may be sure he cannot mean such a faith as is separated from a good life, but that alone which includes and comprehends it.—

It

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It is a weak and foolish, as well as dangerous mistake, to imagine that a man may be saved by the Christian faith, without the leading of a Christian life,—or that the bare belief of the Gospel is sufficient, and no matter whether we obey it.

Were this a thing possible to be true, not only wicked men, but even the devils themselves might then have some hopes of salvation:—For they *also* (says St. James) *believe and tremble*.—But, as he adds immediately, *Wilt thou know, O vain man! that faith without works is dead?*—It is perfectly vain and insignificant, of no value or account in the sight of God, nor will it avail us any thing in the day of Judgment.—In that great and dreadful day, though a man had all faith so as to remove mountains; yet, if his life and actions have been bad and vicious,—his faith shall stand him in no stead, unless he could thereby call the mountains to cover him, and to hide him from the wrath of God.

This, therefore, is a faithful saying (as the Apostle tells us) and worthy of the highest consideration,—that they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works, and to lead good lives;—for these things,

things, and these alone, are good and profitable unto men, Tit. iii. 8.

And thus much for the second head of our inquiry, what that justifying faith is which the Apostle speaks of in my text, and how many things are implied and comprehended under it, viz.

The acknowledging the Blessed Jesus to be the Christ, the son of God, who was sent into the world for the redemption of mankind:—

A belief of all those truths which He hath revealed and taught us in the Gospel:

A reliance on our Saviour's merits for our pardon and salvation:

And, last of all, a serious and effectual resolution to obey the precepts of the Gospel, and to lead a truly Christian life.

This is that faith which alone will serve to justify us in the sight of God,—to procure the pardon of our sins in this life, and eternal happiness in the life to come.

And, having thus dispatched my second head, I shall make one use or inference at present, and conclude this discourse.

And, 1st, if to be justified by faith is to have our sins forgiven through the merits of a Saviour, who is set forth to us as the propitiation for sin; and if the only way of obtaining

ing this forgiveness is to believe his Gospel, and obey it in our life and conversation:—What can be said for those who reject this method of salvation, and vainly hope to be saved by their own imperfect righteousness, whether they believe in Christ or not; as if God's sending his Son into the world for the redemption of mankind were a needless or indifferent thing, and men were at liberty either to receive or reject it at their pleasure.

But as nothing is more certain than that God would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth; so what this truth is He hath told us, what this method of salvation is He hath plainly set before us:—And we must be saved in his way, if at all, and not our own.

So God loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, to the end that they who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life: *There is one God and one Mediator betwixt God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.*—He is our great Advocate and Intercessor at the Throne of Grace, *and no man cometh to the Father but by Him.*

This is the language of Holy Scripture, the wise appointment of Almighty God, and the way

way wherein he hath declared he will convey his benefits and mercies to us :—And shall we proudly throw them back upon Him, and refuse his mercy, unless it be conveyed to us in our own way ?

As long as men have sins to be forgiven, they will always stand in need of a Saviour, and ought therefore to be ever thankful to Almighty God for directing to a way wherein they may apply to Him for mercy and forgiveness, upon their sincere repentance and amendment.

Could we perform a perfect obedience to the Law of God, so as to live intirely and absolutely without sin, we might then, indeed, plead the merit of innocence. And yet even innocence (strictly speaking) can only free from punishment ; it gives no title to reward. But, as sinners, and as guilty persons, we are concerned to sue for pardon in the first place, before we can lay claim to anything besides :—And it belongs to God, who is the offended party, and to Him alone, to prescribe the terms of pardon and reconciliation.—If, therefore, He has expressly declared to us, that He will forgive the sins of men in no other way than that which is set before us in the Gospel, I mean through faith in Christ, the great Mediator

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Mediator betwixt God and man, whom He hath set forth to be the propitiation for sin; if it be told us that there is no other name under heaven given unto man whereby they can be saved,—how dangerous must be the state and condition of those men who wilfully reject this only method of salvation which infinite wisdom has contrived, and infinite mercy offered to lost and sinful creatures?—Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, is or ought to be the prayer of every sober and considerate person; because, in strict justice, and by virtue of his own imperfect righteousness, it is certain no man living can be justified in the sight of God.—

And may God of his infinite mercy grant we may all of us duly consider these things through Jesus Christ our Lord:

To whom, &c.

SECOND

S E C O N D P A R T.

SECONDLY, if the faith by which we are here said to be justified means the Christian faith in general, or such a firm and hearty persuasion of the truth of our religion, as may prove effectual to the reformation of our hearts and lives, hence we may perceive the error of those who have entertained a partial or mistaken notion of that faith which is necessary to justify us.

As, 1st, it has been said by some *, that the faith which justifies is nothing else but a firm persuasion of our own justification:—Or, in other words, it is to believe not only that God hath promised remission of sins in general in the Gospel, but that, in particular, we ourselves are actually pardoned and forgiven,—and that without respect to any conditions to be performed on our part, besides such a faith or belief as this:—A persuasion which is so far from being that wherein the nature of a justifying faith consists, that it is, indeed, no point of faith at all.

* Calvin and his followers.

That

That God hath promised forgiveness of sins to those who perform the conditions required of them in the Gospel is, indeed, a plain and certain truth :—But whether we ourselves are intitled to that forgiveness can only be known by examining of our hearts and lives.—It is not a strong persuasion that we are forgiven that is sufficient to procure a pardon for us, unless we are otherwise qualified for it by living up to the terms and precepts of the Gospel :—And to such as are thus qualified their sins shall be forgiven, through the mercy of Almighty God, whether their persuasion and belief of it be so very strong and certain or not :—So that to place our faith in such a persuasion as this, or to make our justification any way depend upon it, is highly absurd and unreasonable,—nor is there, indeed, the least foundation for it in the Scripture.—

Again, 2dly, There are others * which say that the faith which justifies consists in the application of Christ's merits to ourselves; in the casting ourselves upon the merits of Christ; in the apprehending, relying, or laying hold upon him for salvation :—A definition of faith as unknown to Christians in the first ages of

* Ames, and a great many others, especially our Sectaries :
—See the Assembly's Catechism.

Christianity, as it was common in the last age, and begins to be revived again in this.—

But if by these and the like expressions be meant no more than a bare hope or trust in the merits of Christ,—this (as I before observed) is, indeed, the duty of a Christian, as it is a part or branch of Christian faith.—But then it is certain this alone is far from being sufficient to our justification:—On the contrary, it is the highest folly and presumption to rely upon the merits of our Saviour, if we fail in the performing those conditions which He demands as necessary to salvation;—and these are, as we have before observed, such a firm belief of the great truths and doctrines of Christianity as may prove effectual to the reformation of our hearts and lives.

In a word, the very life and soul of religion consists in the practice of it:—And, unless our faith have this effect upon us, to reform our lives, and make us truly good and virtuous, it can only serve to aggravate our condemnation at the last Day:—We shall be reckoned in the number of those wicked or those slothful servants who knew their Master's will, and did it not; and therefore shall undoubtedly receive a more severe and rigorous punishment.

Re

Ye are my friends (says our Blessed Saviour) *if ye do whatsoever I command you.* John xv. 14.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Matt. vii. 21.

If ye know these things, therefore, happy are ye, if ye do them. John xiii. 17.

For God shall render to every man according to his deeds:

To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; eternal life:

But to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath;—

Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil;—

For there is no respect of persons with God. Rom. ii. 6,—11.

Again, 3dly, From what has been said under the foregoing heads we may be able to give a clear answer to the following questions, viz. At what time it is that a Christian may be said to be justified?—And what is required as necessary to his continuance in a justified state?

For the time when a Christian may be first said to be justified,—it is (without doubt) immediately upon his embracing of the Christian faith, and his being admitted into covenant with God through Christ.—It is then that all his past sins are forgiven through the mercy of Almighty God, and he becomes justified or accepted in his sight.

Hence it is that forgiveness of sins is so often declared in the Holy Scripture to be the constant attendant of baptism. *Arise and be baptised, and wash away thy sins*, Acts. xxii. 16. And again, *Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins*, Acts. ii. 38. And the reason is very plain and manifest:—Because, baptism being that solemn rite or ceremony by which all Christians were admitted into covenant with God through Christ, and the immediate benefit of that covenant being forgiveness of all past sins,—it follows that this forgiveness was conferred in baptism;—and, by thus solemnly entering into covenant with God, by embracing of the Christian faith, and promising and engaging, for the time to come, to believe the doctrines, and obey the precepts of the Gospel,—they immediately received forgiveness of their

their sins, and stood justified and approved in the sight of God.

And hence it is that St. Paul, where he speaks of justification, generally mentions it as a thing past,—a privilege which Christians were partakers of, immediately upon their embracing of Christianity:—*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God*, says the Apostle. The words in the original have a plain respect to the time past:—*Therefore, having been justified by faith*, or having our sins forgiven by our embracing the Christian faith, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

And, as this pardon of their sins, conferred upon them by embracing of the Christian faith, was full and free, the Apostle, in another place, expressly excludes any works that they had done, before their becoming Christians, from having any the least share in contributing towards it:—*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost*. Titus iii. 5.

At the same time the Apostle is so far from denying the necessity of good works, or a sincere obedience to the laws of God, in order

to their continuing in a justified state, and their final salvation at the last day, that he declares expressly that this was the very end for which they were converted to Christianity, that they might do good works, and continue in the practice of an holy life:—*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* Eph. ii. 10.

And this (by the way) may help us the better to understand St. Paul's meaning where he any where speaks of justification by faith without works: For, since the justification which he speaks of followed, immediately upon their embracing of Christianity, it is certain that the works which he excludes from justifying can be only such as were done before their becoming Christians:—Not such works as they performed under the influence of the Christian faith; for these, it is certain, were such as followed after justification; and therefore the works which he excludes from justifying must be only such as were done before their being converted to Christianity.—And thus is it that we are to understand that passage, Titus iii. 5. *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of*

of the Holy Ghost;—i. e. not by any works of righteousness that we could do before we became Christians were we saved, or put into a state of salvation;—but through the mercy of God alone, when we embraced Christianity, and were baptised into the Christian faith, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost:—*According to his mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.* So that the works which St. Paul excludes from having a share in their justification were only those they had done before their becoming Christians. And these, it is certain, could contribute nothing to their justification, how specious soever they might appear:—Because, being in a state of enmity with God, by reason of their sins, their good works, which were likewise at the best imperfect, could claim no favour or acceptance at the hands of God;—and, therefore, it was absolutely necessary that they should be justified, i. e. acquitted from the guilt of their past sins, and taken into favour and reconciliation with God, before they could do any works that would be truly good or acceptable to Him.

What has been observed may help us, then, to give an answer to the second question, viz.

E c 4 What

What is required as necessary to our continuance in a justified state?

And that is, in one word,—a sincere obedience to the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel,—our persevering in the Christian faith, and in the practice of a truly Christian life.—

And this is what every one engages for himself, when he takes upon him the profession of Christianity.—It is, indeed, the express condition God requires of us in order to salvation:—And, as long as we perform this condition, as long as we continue, in the general course and tenor of our lives, to pay obedience to those rules and precepts which are set us in the Gospel, so long do we continue in a justified state:—As, on the other hand, when we fail in the performing this condition, when we walk contrary to the rules and precepts of the Gospel, and turn aside to any lewd or wicked course, we forfeit all our title to the divine favour and forgiveness, and are no longer in a state of justification or salvation.

It may, however, be considered,—that it is not every sin which we commit that presently destroys our title to salvation, or that can put us out of favour with Almighty God:—For, if this were so, it would be impossible for any good Christian to continue long in favour with Him :

Him: No, it is certain that the best of Christians are liable to frequent slips and failings in their duty;—I mean, not any gross or wilful sins, but sins of ignorance or infirmity, of negligence or surprise; such as are sometimes incident, even to the best of Christians, merely through the weakness and imperfection of human nature. These, I say, are such as every one is daily guilty of, and for which, therefore, our Saviour Christ has taught us to pray our Heavenly Father to forgive us, as often as we pray to Him for our daily bread.—But these are such as do not presently destroy our title to salvation:—But only wilful and presumptuous sins, such more especially as are heinous and provoking in their own nature, or such as men have rendered customary and familiar to them, though they know them to be sinful.—Such as these, I say, are utterly inconsistent with that sincere obedience which we owe to God, and, by consequence, destroy our title to his favour and to everlasting happiness.

However, such is the mercy and goodness of God that He hath not left us without a remedy in this case;—but, even when men have forfeited his grace and favour by their wilful disobedience, He has shewn them a way

way whereby they may be reconciled unto Him, and recover that state which they had lost; and that is by an hearty and unfeigned repentance for their past sin,—and by walking from thenceforth in newness of life.

Thus may the truly penitent obtain a pardon for his sins, and again stand justified and approved in the sight of God:—*For, if the wicked will turn from all his wickedness which he hath committed, and keep my statutes (says God) and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Ezek. xviii.*

21. Repentance and reformation of life is the only way whereby the sinner can hope to regain the favour of God, and to renew his title to salvation. Last of all,—in order to our full and final justification at the last Day,—it is necessary that we persevere and continue in well-doing to the end of our lives:—*For he alone that shall endure to the end (says our Blessed Lord, Matt. xxiv. 13.) the same shall be saved.—But, if after we have escaped the pollutions of the world, we are again intangled therein, and overcome; our latter end, the Apostle assures us, shall be worse with us than the beginning. 2 Pet. ii. 20.*

In short, our future happiness in the life to come depends upon our final perseverance here

in this life :—And, therefore, it behoves us, when we have once entered upon a religious course, to go on and continue therein to the last ;—not to suffer ourselves to be drawn aside by any temptation whatsoever from following that which is our duty,—but to be faithful unto death :—And so shall we receive a crown of life,—so shall we be fully justified and absolved from all our sins at the last Day, and be put into such a state where we shall need no farther absolution or forgiveness, because we shall sin no more for ever ;—so shall we be for ever fixed in the favour of that God, whose loving-kindness is better than life itself, and who is able to make us happy beyond all conception :—For in his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.—

To which God of his infinite mercy bring us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord :—To whom, &c.

THIRD

T H I R D A N D L A S T P A R T .

I Come now to the third general head of this discourse, viz. to inquire how it is that we are justified through our Lord Jesus Christ?

And to this it may be answered briefly,—As it is for his sake only that our sins are graciously forgiven,—that God is pleased to enter into a covenant of grace and mercy with the sinner, and admit him to the hopes of pardon and salvation upon, the terms and conditions of the Gospel.—

For the better understanding whereof, it may behove us to consider the method of our redemption, as it is set out to us in the Holy Scriptures.

And here we learn, that, when the first man had transgressed the Law of God, and, as the consequence of that transgression, sin had got an entrance into the world, and all mankind were become sinners, and, as such, were liable to punishment and condemnation, God was pleased, out of his abundant mercy and goodness, to appoint a Saviour or Redeemer who should

should satisfy for our offences, and restore us to the means of pardon and salvation.

In pursuance of this great design, when the fulness of time was come, He sent his only begotten Son into the world for our redemption, —and the way and method which He took for that purpose consisted chiefly in the two following particulars :

First, In offering up his own most precious life, as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of men :

And, secondly, In establishing a new and better covenant with mankind, upon a sincere performance of the conditions whereof, they should obtain salvation.

First, He offered up his own most precious life, as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of men.—And this was no more than necessary to satisfy the justice of Almighty God, and, at the same time, to display his wisdom in the punishment of sin,—that mankind might be hereby awed into obedience, and, by such an instance of the Divine justice and severity against sin, might the more effectually be deterred from sinning for the future.

Hence it is that He is said to be the Lamb of God, which was slain from the foundation of the world.—i. e. slain in the purpose and intention

intention of Almighty God, to expiate the offences of mankind, and to redeem them from that wrath which they had provoked, but were of themselves unable to appease.—Hence it is that He is so often said in Holy Scripture to have suffered for our sins,—to have redeemed us with his blood,—to have reconciled us unto God by his cross,—to have given himself a ransom for all,—and to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

Nor can we in the least incline to doubt or question but the death of Christ was in itself a valuable compensation, a perfect and sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the world, when we consider the dignity of the person paying it, even the eternal Son of God, who for that purpose became man, together with the greatness of his sufferings, and the unblemished holiness and integrity of his life: *For such an High Priest became us* (and therefore could not but offer up an acceptable sacrifice for us) *who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners.*—Heb. vii. 26.

I shall only add, that the necessity of such a sacrifice as this to satisfy the justice of Almighty God, and expiate for the sins of men, as it was sufficiently declared in the very frame and structure of the Jewish religion,—so it is
what

what the Heathen likewise seem to have had some notion of;—they could not but conclude from those natural apprehensions which they had of God Almighty's justice, that He would demand some compensation or another by way of satisfaction for their sins;—and, therefore, being intirely destitute of, or rather having lost the knowledge of a Saviour or Redeemer, who was promised for that purpose,—they were forced to take up with other ways and methods of atoning for their sins, such as their own superstition and folly could invent,—so as sometimes to sacrifice even their own sons and daughters,—*the fruit of their body* (as the Prophet elegantly expresses it) *for the sin of their soul.*

But that which all other sacrifices were incapable of doing, I mean to make a real and effectual expiation for the sins of men, was at last performed (as the Holy Scriptures tell us) by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,—Himself being, at the same time, both the Priest and sacrifice,—who, by tasting death for every man, and by offering himself without spot to God, hath obtained eternal redemption for us.—Heb. ix. 12.

2dly, Our Blessed Saviour, having thus atoned for the sins of mankind, became the Mediator

diator of a new and better covenant,—a covenant of grace and mercy,—wherein the pardon of sins and eternal life and salvation are promised to all such as shall repent and believe the Gospel, and obey it in their life and conversation.—

This is the express condition of this second covenant:—And, to enable us to perform this condition, we have a promise likewise of the Divine grace and assistance;—so that, unless we are very much wanting to ourselves, unless we become our own enemies, we cannot fall short of that salvation which our Saviour Christ hath purchased for us.

Such, then, is that part which our Blessed Redeemer bears in our justification: As by his precious death he made a full atonement for the sins of men, and obtained eternal life and happiness for all those who perform the conditions required of them in the Gospel,—i. e. for all such as have embraced the Christian faith, and lead their lives answerably thereunto. It is through the merits of our Blessed Saviour, and through Him alone, that our faith and obedience, frail and imperfect as they are, do find acceptance at the hands of God, and shall hereafter be rewarded with eternal glory:—Whereas, without it, all that
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we are able to perform would not be sufficient to this purpose :—*For all have sinned* (says the Apostle) *and come short of the glory of God ; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.* Rom. iii. 23, 24.

And, having thus shewn at large in what sense it is that we are justified through our Lord Jesus Christ;—I cannot but take notice of a very common error and mistake which some men have fallen into concerning this point;—and that is, that we are justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us for our justification:

For it has been said,—that Christ having fulfilled the Law in our stead, his righteousness does in a true and proper sense become ours,—and that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to every true believer in the same manner as if he himself had actually performed it in his own person;—that therefore we are justified by the righteousness of Christ, thus imputed to us, without respect to any righteousness inherent in us, or any thing that we can perform in our own persons.

The consequences of which opinion are sufficiently absurd as well as hurtful:—For, if the righteousness of Christ were thus imputed

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to every true believer, so as to become, in a proper sense, his righteousness, it would follow, that every true believer would be equally righteous;—nay more, that every true believer would by imputation, and in the account of God Almighty, be as righteous as Christ himself, which to suppose would be the height of folly and impiety.—

It is plain, then, that there can be no such imputation of the righteousness of Christ to Christians as is here supposed;—and it is in vain that we expect salvation, unless we labour to attain to some degree of righteousness of our own,—though, at the same time, this imperfect righteousness of ours is accepted only for the sake and through the merits of our Blessed Saviour.

In a word, the way in which our Blessed Lord hath wrought salvation for us (as I observed before) is plainly this:—As by his meritorious sufferings and death he made a full atonement and satisfaction for the sins of mankind, and thereby obtained a new and better covenant for us, by the conditions whereof we must either stand or fall;—if we perform the conditions of this second covenant, which are repentance from dead works, together with a lively faith and obedience to the will

will of God, as far as we are able in this state of frailty and infirmity,—an obedience, though not absolutely perfect and free from all sin, yet, however, real and sincere, and as perfect as we can ;—if we perform this condition of the Christian covenant, we shall not fail (through the merits of our Blessed Saviour) to obtain eternal life and happiness :—Whereas, if we fall short of the performing this condition, it is certain there is nothing can avail us to salvation ;—for such as these the Saviour of the world hath died in vain ;—and He, who came on purpose to redeem us from eternal misery, will be himself the Judge who shall pronounce sentence at the Last Day on all the disobedient Christians, and condemn them to a state of misery and torment.—

I have been so long upon this head that I shall be very brief in my

Fourth and last inquiry, viz. What that peace with God is which is here said to be the happy fruit and effect of this justification ;—*Therefore, being justified by faith* (says the Apostle) *we have peace with God.*—

By our having peace with God, then, may be meant no more, in the first design and meaning of the phrase, but only our being reconciled unto him,—when, being justified

and absolved from all our sins, we are taken into grace and favour with Almighty God, and are no longer reckoned in the number of his enemies.

But, in a larger sense, the peace with God, here mentioned, may signify that peace of mind which the good Christian feels and enjoys from the sense of God Almighty's favour to him, and a chearful hope or persuasion of his being in a justified state;—and it is in this sense that I chuse to understand it.

Now this peace of mind will ordinarily bear proportion to that assurance which a Christian has of his being in a state of grace and favour with Almighty God;—and the ground of this assurance must be laid (if we proceed aright) in the careful examination of his heart and life,—that he may see whether he hath lived up to those conditions God requires of us in the Gospel Covenant, viz. a lively faith and a sincere obedience:—And, as far as we can assure ourselves, upon a due examination, of our having lived up to those conditions, so far have we reason to entertain a well grounded peace and hope:—Whereas whatsoever is built on other considerations than this can be only a rash and foolish peace, a false and dangerous security.—

It was the advice of St. Paul (Gal. vi. 4.) *Let every man prove his own work, i. e. let him try and examine his own life, and, if that be found to have been such as the Gospel rule requires,—then, says he, shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another.*—And the same Apostle, speaking of the hope and comfort which himself enjoyed, and every other good Christian, lays down this as the foundation of it,—*Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*—2 Cor. i, 12.

It is true, such is the mixed uncertain course of life which the generality of Christians lead,—that, ordinarily speaking, few, if any, perhaps, even among good Christians, are so sure of having done their duty as thereon to build a certain and infallible assurance of their being in a state of grace and favour with Almighty God;—much less can they, as some pretend, be sure of their continuance in such a state that they cannot fail of persevering in it to the end, and so of finally obtaining salvation.

The utmost that the best of Christians ordinarily attain unto is only a good degree of hope, not an absolute assurance of their salvation.—I say this is the utmost which the good

Christian ordinarily attains unto.—It is possible, indeed, that, in extraordinary cases, good men may sometimes have extraordinary assurances vouchsafed them by Almighty God, by way of comfort and support:—Such St. Paul seems to have had, when he was now about to suffer martyrdom at Rome for the profession of the Christian faith: For he speaks of it with a sort of triumph, and as if it were the happiest thing that could befall him:—*For I am now ready to be offered, says he, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:—Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.*—2 Tim. iv. 6, 7.

Such an extraordinary assurance as this was, perhaps, no more than necessary to encourage and support this great Apostle in his last conflict with death:—Whereas, at other times, we find him speaking with somewhat less assurance, and even with some degree of diffidence concerning his salvation:—*Though I know nothing by myself (says he) yet am I not hereby justified, or sure of being acquitted in the sight of God:—But he that judgeth me is the Lord.*—1 Cor. iv. 4. And again,—*I keep under my body, says he, and bring it into subjection,*

jection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.—1 Cor. ix. 27. So that we see even this great Apostle, when he wrote this; though he had undoubtedly a good hope that he should be saved, expresses no infallible assurance, no absolute certainty of his salvation.

Nor is it, indeed, expedient that any good Christian should have such an absolute assurance, because this might be too apt to betray him into a dangerous security;—and, whilst he thought himself already certain of salvation, he would use but little diligence to make his calling and election sure.—

In a word, all that is needful for us here in this life, and all that the best of Christians usually attain unto, is only (as I before observed) a good degree of hope, not an absolute certainty of their salvation.

And such a comfortable hope as this is sufficient to sustain the good Christian, and to carry him along with joy and chearfulness through all the hardships of his duty.—The only ground upon which he can safely build this hope, next to the mercy of Almighty God, and the merits and mediation of our Blessed Saviour, is the sense of having done his duty, and the conscience of a life well spent.—This, where
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it appears upon reflection with any tolerable clearness, cannot but fill the heart with joy and comfort, and produce that peace of mind which is the peculiar happiness of the good Christian, and which, in the pleasure and satisfaction of it, far surpasses all understanding. If, however, there may be some good Christians, as undoubtedly there are, who do not feel this peace of mind within them,—but are troubled with fears, and doubts, and perplexities, concerning their spiritual estate, the best advice that can be given to them is, that they would endeavour to live with more exactness, and then, perhaps, they would soon experience more of spiritual hope and comfort. Though it may sometimes happen, that this perplexity and fear, this pensive doubt and distrust, that lodge in the bosom of a good Christian, may be only the effect of a disordered mind, or a melancholy constitution,—this is certain, that, if we do our duty with sincerity and diligence, that is, if we do the best we are able (and who is there that cannot do as much as that, if he pleases ?) we have all the reason in the world to trust in the Divine mercy ;—and, though we ought not to presume, or grow secure and confident,—yet we may justly entertain

tain a chearful hope of our everlasting salvation.—

What remains, then, but, in the last place, briefly to exhort you, in the words of the Apostle, to add to your faith virtue,—and to shew the truth and reality of your belief by the conscientious practice of a good life.—

This is that which alone will serve to justify us in the sight of God,—to procure his favour and forgiveness here, and everlasting happiness hereafter, through the merits and mediation of our ever Blessed Redeemer:—

To whom, &c.

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